



# Pikku Saari

## How to develop a textile brand in Japan

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# Abstract

The topic of my thesis is the textile brand, Pikku Saari that I started in Japan in 2015. The thesis explores ideas for developing the brand. This is a practice-based thesis in which main focus is on the creative production of collection making. As a support of the creative production, all the related matters around Pikku Saari are examined in order to study how the brand can be developed more attractive for the Japanese market.

Chapter 1 explores the reasons why Finnish design and culture are so popular in Japan. These reasons were analyzed by interviewing two experts in the field in order to think what Pikku Saari could offer for the Japanese market and how the results of the research can be reflected in the design.

Chapter 2 focuses on my position as a Japanese designer in Finland through an interview with Fujiwo Ishimoto who has worked as a designer based in Finland over 40 years. The potential of my Japanese and somewhat Finnish point of view is also considered.

Chapter 3 consists of expert interviews and brand research. The interview with Noora Niinikoski, Head of Design at Nanso gives insights to the process of making a collection. For brand study, three Japanese brands including nani IRO, minä perhonen and Kippis are examined. Interviews with Finnish textile designer Elina Rebers and Teija Puranen who have worked with Japanese companies provide the perspective of Finnish designers working in the Japanese context. The interviews shed light to what Japanese companies expect from Finnish designers.

In chapter 4, origins of Pikku Saari are explained including inspiration and concept of the brand. Effective marketing tools for branding such as collaborations and the use of media are examined. Finally, ways to develop the brand further are discussed.

In chapter 5, the design process of the collection is described including sketches, colorways, material choices, sample checks and photo shoots. All the collections since 2015 are visually presented

In chapter 6, the meaning of the exhibition as a marketing tool for Pikku Saari is considered and the previous exhibitions and an upcoming exhibition are introduced.

In the conclusion, significant outcomes of the research are reviewed and the future direction of the Pikku Saari is considered.



Fig. 1 Working at the homestudio



# 0. PREFACE

Finland was the first foreign country that I visited in my life. I was 13 years old. One day my mother asked me if I wanted to spend a summer in Finland. I answered yes right away. I have to admit that I did not know much about the country, but I was sure that something exciting will be there. And here I am. After 25 years later, I am living in the capital of Finland and settled down with a husband and a daughter. Life is surely full of surprises.

After working at the Art Work Studio at Marimekko, I became a freelance designer in 2014. I have had no complains about my jobs. I felt very lucky to be able to work in my field as a full-time worker. But one thing was bothering me. I could not design my own print designs as far as I work there. That was a policy that my boss had when I was working there.

I gained the chance to offer designs when I was working on my bachelor thesis. I got a permission to offer print designs for study purposes. After finishing work, I was drawing all kinds of ideas. I had no idea where to start since it was the first time that I offer my own designs. I showed my designs to Noora Niinikoski, who was Head of Fashion Design at that time. Fortunately, three of my designs were chosen for the collection 2013SS and 2013AW. This was the starting point of my freelance career. I left for the study leave for two years and my boss gave me an assignment: I had to decide if I return my old comfy office to work as a full-time worker or become independent and continue designing my own things. During the study leave, I kept designing and did all kinds of works. It was like a trial period if I could survive as a freelance designer. Two years passed very quickly, and time of the decision finally came. It was not easy at all. My 50-year-old boss said, “Make a decision so that you won’t regret when you turn 50.” My partner also showed his support saying, “whatever you choose I will support you.”

This is how I became a freelance designer in 2014. I had to say good-bye to the perfect workplace and jumped into the unknown world with more risks. Once you decide, things seem to happen simultaneously. Soon after my independence started, I got an offer to build my own textile brand in Japan. I named the brand, Pikku Saari and it was launched in 2015. This brand is under the textile company called Kokka. It has many brands which are produced by artists and designers mainly in Japan. The concept of

Pikku Saari is daily life in Helsinki. One of the aims of the brand is to introduce Finnish lifestyle, which I believe is fairly different from the one from Japan, especially Tokyo.

The thesis is about my brand, Pikku Saari, which I created in 2015. In this practice-based work, the process of making fabric collections for Pikku Saari 2015 - 2018 is described and the ways how it could be further developed is studied.

In addition to the design process, the cultural context will be examined. What makes Japanese people interested in Finnish designs and culture will be analyzed to find the key elements which could make Pikku Saari even more appealing for Japanese market.

Other brands and designers are examined to map the competitors and expectations on the market to search solutions to create a unique brand and to find out effective marketing tools. Through this thesis, what kind of messages and values to be expressed by means of brand are reconsidered.

I have been working as a freelance designer since 2014. Most of my clients are Japanese companies. As a Japanese designer based in Finland, it is rewarding to research the connections between these two cultures. I hope this thesis will bring deeper insight about my position and where to move on. Many designers in Finland are working with foreign companies nowadays. Not only satisfying my own needs, but this thesis will also give some ideas for who are interested in foreign markets especially Japanese ones.





Fig. 2 Coco 2014SS, Paripala 2013SS and Kukkasade 2013AW, Marimekko

# 1. Finnish design in Japan

## 1.1 Keywords for the Scandinavia boom in Japan

Without a doubt, Japanese and Finnish people have been interested in each other and this is getting more and more visible on many levels. People from both countries are attracted to each other's cultures and feel that they have something in common. Japanese people are so familiar with Finnish characters and brands such as Moomin, Marimekko, Arabia and Santa Claus especially in the past decade. When I came to Finland for the first time in 1994, people in Japan did not know much about Finland. Some people even thought that I was visiting Philippines because of the similar pronunciation in the Japanese language.

Over the past 10 years the visibility of Finland has vastly increased. Within the past ten years Finnish culture including Nordic culture and lifestyle has become very popular. This phenomenon is not a temporary trend but has settled down as a part of the Japanese market. What makes Japanese people so interested in Finnish culture? What are the elements of Finland I want to introduce to Japan? During the time I have been working as a writer and coordinator for Japanese magazines and books I have been asking myself these questions constantly as a messenger of the Finnish culture. As a designer working between Japan and Finland, I would like to research the connections

between these countries once again.

Here are some keywords when understanding the Scandinavian boom in Japan.

### ***Hokuo***

*Hokuo* means Northern Europe or Scandinavia. Precisely Finland is not a part of Scandinavia but belong to Nordic countries. In Japan, when they say Scandinavia, Finland is also included. In this thesis when I use 'Scandinavia', it includes Finland. The term *hokuo* became very common along with the Scandinavia boom in Japan. The word *hokuo* is used in many contexts from *hokuo* education, *hokuo* design, *hokuo* Lifestyle and so on and paid attention well. Large department stores organize '*hokuo*' fairs around Japan. One of the major ones are *hokuo* Christmas Market at Nagoya Takashimaya. Hankyu Umeda is just starting *hokuo* fair this spring.

### ***Kamome shokudo***

There was a small restaurant called Kahvila Suomi on Pursimiehenkatu. The restaurant served Finnish traditional food and it was loved by local people and Japanese tourists. This is where the Japanese movie *Kamome Shokudo* (Fig. 3) was shot and this movie made a huge impact about



Finland especially on Japanese women.

The story is about a Japanese woman starting a small restaurant in Helsinki. In the beginning, no customers came to the restaurant but through meeting locals and friends, the restaurant become a unique place where local customers enjoy their meal and the air was filled with smiles.

Finnish tableware and textile in the movie attracted the audience and people felt very familiar with the Finnish culture through the movie. In the last ten years the number of the Japanese visitors has grown, and this movie played a great role in introducing Finland to Japanese people.

***Zakka***

*During Japan's postwar economic boom, the term "zakka," which literally means "uncategorizable things," was usually used for mundane everyday tools and objects such as*

*kettles, brooms and buckets. Since then, it has evolved to mean miscellaneous goods of a much broader range and is often used by stores for toys, housewares and even groceries.* Kikuchu, Daisuke (2016)

There is no direct translation for the word, but it means mixture of small things. It covers quite a wide area including kitchen tools, interior goods and stationary. *Zakka* (Fig. 4) is not luxury but something you can easily purchase and take into daily life. It is something that brings simple happiness into everyday life. When I was working as a coordinator for magazines, people were usually looking for cafes and *zakka* shops. It seems like people who like Scandinavia are big fans of Scandinavian *zakka*, '*Hokuo Zakka*'. *Zakka* would be a beneficial concept when you aim to enter the Japanese market.



Fig.3 Flyer from the movie, 'Kamome Shokudo' (2016)



Fig. 4 the exhibition "Zakka Goods and Things" at 21\_21 Design Sight, Tokyo 2016

## 1.2 Interviews about the Finnish culture in Japan

How well do people in Japan know Finland and Finnish design. I managed to ask several questions to two experts in different fields who have been deeply involved in Finland and Japan. The first answers are from Eriko Nemoto, the editor of Takarajima publishing company. Takarajima is specialized in women's magazines. They publish mooks related to Scandinavian design and culture called 'Love Scandinavia!', which is nowadays 'Kurashito watashito hokuoto' (Life, me and *hokuoto*). Mook is a new style of publishing which is between book and magazine. At the interview of the editor who has involved in making 'Love Scandinavia!' and the producer of Kippis, I asked how people in Japan got to know Finnish design in the past decade and how the trends are nowadays. The second answers are from Shino Mikamo, the CEO of the travel agency that has worked over 30 years in promoting trips to Finland.

### Takarajima Eriko Nemoto 13.03.2018

#### Question 1

**Who are interested in Finland? How much do they know about Finland compared to other Scandinavian countries?**

"Women who are late 20 to 60 years old are interested in Finland. People are more interested in interior and *zakka* than fashion from Finland. It seems like house wives and women with children are more interested because they are more curious about lifestyle. People who like handcraft also like Scandinavia.

Among Scandinavian countries, Finland is the most well-known. Some people only go to Finland. In other words, when people say they go to

Scandinavian countries, they would not miss Finland."

#### Question 2

**How did the Scandinavian boom start? Is it still going? How has the phenomenon developed?**

"At the beginning of 2000, furniture of mid-century like Eames became very popular. People's target of interests moved to design chairs and then to the Scandinavian chairs. At that time, the number of fans were rather small, and the target of interest was limited to design. And it was rather men than women.

In 2006, *hokuoto* became a general phenomenon when Ikea's first shop was open in Japan and the movie *Kamome Shokudo* was a big success. People became familiar with Scandinavian furniture and textile gradually. *Kamome Shokudo* did a great role in spreading the image of Finland, which people could differentiate Finland from other Scandinavian countries. Talented actresses in the movie spread the fine image of the Finnish brand by using design products such as Marimekko, Arabia and Artek in the movie. Because of this movie, these brands were also acknowledged that they are from Finland. Some people call this 'Scandinavia boom' but it seems like the phenomenon is not really a boom since the boom will disappear sooner or later. Even though the peak of the popularity of *hokuoto* has gone, it seems like it settled down in the lifestyle of Japan.

After 2010, a variety of Moomin products and Marimekko became wildly popular. Despite the fact that many apparel and *zakka* companies were struggling after the Tohoku earthquakes in 2011, the sales of Moomin and Marimekko kept

growing. At that time, people were not attracted to superficial things after the tragedy. Because of the vivid colors, stories, high quality Scandinavian brands were more accepted especially by women. For example, the brand mook about Marimekko was published twice and the sale has been increasing. First, number of the print was 100000 in April 2010 and the second time was twice. 80000 of Moomin Mook was published in autumn 2011, and 150000 in the Autumn 2012. Nowadays moomin mook is published once a year and the number is from 60000 to 100000 and the popularity is stable.

Marimekko seems to struggle with selling textiles nowadays but their backpacks are selling very well. You'll see at least two people have the backpack when you enter a train. It is popular as a backpack for mothers and you will see that every third mother has one in the park in Tokyo."

### **Question 3**

#### **Why is Finland so popular? What is the difference between Finland and other Scandinavian countries?**

"Finland is the most popular because it has several distinctive brands and Finland is exposed in the media quite a lot. Finland is also easier to access than the other Scandinavian countries. It is true that some Japanese people cannot really distinguish Scandinavian countries, but Finland is for sure representing Scandinavia"

### **Question 4**

#### **What kind of Finnish brands are well known in Japan? Why?**

##### **Marimekko**

"Unikko (Fig. 5) and the backpacks are the most popular. Marimekko is known for the functional-

ity. People feel that Marimekko is a typical Finnish brand."

##### **Moomin**

"The Moomin animation was seen in Japan in 70s and people between the age of 40 and 50 know about Moomin very well. In 2000, products with artistic touch were made and people were surprised with joy and so the Moomins became popular again.

These two are the major things that Japanese people know from Finnish brand. Next three brands are also well known."

##### **Iittala**

"Teema (Fig. 7) has been popular."

##### **Arabia**

"People saw Arabia tableware in *Kamome Shokudo* and Arabia is well exposed in the media. Moomin mugs are popular. Paratiisi is preferred as a wedding gift."

##### **Artek**

"The stool and Domus chair (Fig. 6) are well known. Collaboration with minä perhonen made Japanese customers know the brand and it was a very effective marketing tool."

### **Question 5**

#### **How about textile? Marimekko is well known but how about other brands and individual designers?**

"There are several brands which have stable fans such as Kauniste, Finlayson and Rörstrand but they seem to be categorized broadly as a Scandinavian brand. People buy their products when they find something they like but they are not so distinguishing as a brand.



As far as designers, Fujiwo Ishimoto and Katsuji Wakisaka, who used to be Marimekko's designer are well known among Scandinavian design fans. Fujiwo Ishimoto had an exhibition at Spiral in Tokyo and it was a big success. Katsuji Wakisaka is in charge of a brand, SOU•SOU from Kyoto. Their popularity has calmed down but still popular. Unfortunately, people do not know much about individual designers in general."

#### **Question 6**

**Who is the famous Finnish designer in Japan? How much do they know about designers?**

"In general, people do not know about designers. People who love Unikko do not necessarily know about Maija Isola. Harri Koskinen is well known among professionals in interior and design field, but otherwise not so recognized."

#### **Question 7**

**What kind of aspects of Finland do you want to introduce to Japan which are not familiar?**

"Equality between women and men, good social welfare, social system, the way of thinking, life-style, sweets and food."



Fig. 5 Unikko (1964) was designed by Maija Isola, Marimekko



Fig. 6 Domus chair (1946), Ilmari Tapiovaara



Fig. 7 Kilta (currently Teema) was released in 1953. Designed by Kaj Frank

## Finntour – Shino Mikamo

### 14.03.2018

Finntour is the Japanese travel agency specialized in the trip to Finland with 30 years of experiences. I succeeded in receiving the answers to the questions from the CEO of the company.

#### Question 1

**Who are interested in Finland? How much do they know about Finland compared to other Scandinavian countries?**

“80 % of these people are women from the age between 20 and 60. The reason why they got interested in Finland can be *zakka* such as Marimekko and Arabia, Moomin and the relaxed feeling of the movie *Kamome Shokudo*, education and welfare, and northern lights. People from Kansai, Nagoya and Fukuoka are interested in Finland because there is a direct flight to Helsinki by Finnair.

Compared to the other Scandinavian countries, more women of younger generations are interested. Acknowledgment is getting higher year by year.”

#### Question 2

**How did the Scandinavian boom start? Is it still going? How has the phenomenon developed?**

“Scandinavian design boom has started around 2000. The movie *Kamome shokudo* (2016) played a key role in the movement. 20 – 30-year-old women who are a bit tired of the current situation got some energy from the movie. The message of the movie is that you do not have to pretend to be someone else, but you can live honestly and there is a place where you are accepted as who you are. Many people admire Finland as a place with hope

and started to visit. The phenomenon started little by little from 2006 and the boom has stayed for 10 years. At the same time women’s fashion magazine *Linie* whose key message is ‘natural’ became a trend. The boom spread to 60-year-old women who are keen on fashion.

Scandinavian design boom started with Aarne Jacobsen and Fritz Hansen through *Elle Décor* magazine, and then Architecture and interior design such as Alvar Aalto (Fig. 8) and Eero Aarnio (Fig. 9). After that people have been gradually interested in *zakka* and textile which are easier to purchase and are for daily use and feel something Scandinavia in their life especially for young working women who like *Kamome Shokudo*.

Finnish products are the most popular among other Scandinavian designs. They are easier to purchase and well designed. It is also easier to take in small room and people can feel joy by having something Scandinavia.

Moomin boom started before Tove Jansson’s 100th anniversary. Moomin is loved by people with wide range of age.

All those elements combined are the reason why people are interested in Finland.”

#### Question 3

**Why is Finland so popular? What is the difference between Finland and other Scandinavian countries?**

“Easy access from Japan to Finland is an essential key for the popularity. Finnair (Fig. 10) flies not only to Tokyo but to Nagoya, Kansai and Fukuoka. JAL started to fly between Helsinki and Tokyo. From Narita two flight per day. Finland is the closest European country from Japan.”

#### Question 4

**What kind of Finnish brands are well known in Japan? Why?**

“Popular brands are Marimekko, Arabia, Iittala. Then comes to Finlayson, Artek, Kauniste, Tomfisk, Lapuan Kankurit.”

#### Question 5

**How about textile? Marimekko is well known but how about other brands and individual designers?**

“Finlayson became famous because of the moomin fabric. Kauniste’s design was used in the TV commercial. Lapuan Kankurit is getting more popular.”

#### Question 6

**Who is the famous Finnish designer in Japan? How much do they know about designers?**

“People are familiar with brands but not designers. Most of the case, people find their favorite designs and they do not necessarily know who designed.”

#### Question 7

**What kind of aspects of Finland do you want to introduce in Japan which are not familiar?**

“Many people visited Helsinki. I hope people will explore countryside, and other cities in the near future.

I would like Japanese people to know the way Finnish people live and the slow time compared to Japan. I hope people are eventually aware of the essential value that people in Japan should have in life.”



Fig. 8 Alvar Aalto (1898-1976) Photo: Alvar Aalto Museum.



Fig. 9 Eero Aarnio (1932 -)

## Summary of the interview

From the interview, people who like Finnish design and culture are women between the age of 20 and 60. One of the influencers is the movie *Kamome shokudo* (2016). In the movie, people can relax because the message of the movie is that you do not have to pretend to be someone else. You can be who you are and be happy. This attitude is the key in the whole *hokuo* boom. *Hokuo zakka* is popular because people can easily adopt them in the daily life and it becomes a small Scandinavian element a part of the life. It is like a good luck charm to encourage them to be happy.

Why Finland succeeded in creating attractive *zakka*? Most of the designs which are well known in Japan are from the golden age of the Finnish design such as Unikko, Domus chair, Teema mentioned in the interview of Eriko Nemoto. Finland lost the WWII and they had to build the country all over again. One outcome of the war time is functionality in design. For example, Kaj Frank broke the idea of the traditional dinner-set and created the modern tableware series which are great in stacking and could even fit in the small kitchen of apartment houses.

Another example of functionality is Domus chair. Ilmari Tapiovaara designed it for the student

housing in Helsinki. He designed the chair so that it could work as a studying chair and dinner chair at the same time because space and material were limited. I interviewed Suvi Saloniemi, the curator of Design Museum for the Elle Décor Japan in 2017 and she mentioned that Finnish designers are often good at problem solving. Limited condition sometimes leads brilliant results as in the case of Domus chair.

Marimekko lighted the post-war grayness with color and bold patterns. With its cutting edge designs, it succeeded to bring hope for the better future. Many designs from the 1950's and 60's are still in use nowadays, Unikko (poppy) pattern being the most famous.

These classic masterpieces were designed to make people's life more beautiful. They are ascetic and functional because of the lack of resources. The strength of these design is the philosophy behind the products. In the interview of Eriko Nemoto, Finnish brand survived even after Tohoku earthquake in 2011 while many fast-fashion brands got damaged in sales. Timeless, long lasting, good quality and functionality are the key words that Japanese people seek for in Finnish design and it is a heritage of the golden age of design.



Fig. 10 Finnair collaborating with Marimekko





Fig. 11 Lepo (1991) designed by Fujiwo Ishimoto, Marimekko

## 2. As a Japanese designer in Finland

### 2.1 Interview with Fujiwo Ishimoto 28.02.2018

My position is somewhat special since I am from Japan living in Finland. I will always be a Japanese designer in Finland. In order to make sure my mission and position, I had an interview with Fujiwo Ishimoto (Fig. 12). Mr. Ishimoto has lived in Finland over 40 years and has played a great role in the history of Marimekko.

Fujiwo Ishimoto visited Finland at the end of his world tour and has stayed until now. He grew up in Ehime prefecture, which is a part of Shikoku islands. He was a very inventive child and loved making things with his hands. Once he got interested in something he had an amazing concentration, which sometimes caused some problems from viewpoint of his mother especially. Once when he was making a glider and realized that some piece was missing. He thought the wooden part of the Japanese paper wall was suitable and cut some piece off without thinking. This is one story from his childhood which he thinks he still has the same feature.

He studied graphic design at Tokyo Art University. Listening to his senior friend's advice, he started working at Ichida. The company was dealing widely from interior textile to Kimono. He was hired in the marketing department, and he was in

charge of advertisement including photo shoots for the catalogue and displays of the shops. Even though it was a textile company, he was not interested in designing fabrics. After having worked for the company for 6 years, he decided to go on a trip around the world. "In the late 1960s, many people went off to see the world. Two of my friends were travelling around the world and I also wanted to do so as well." He decided that he would travel around the world on the New Year's Day and quit the job. He had not planned to do this for long time, so he did not save up money for the trip. He had enough money to buy the flight tickets after he got retirement money and sold his car.



Fig. 12 Fujiwo Ishimoto (1941-)

First, he went off to the East and came to America. He was interested in New York because it was the center of the advertisement world. Despite the high expectation, New York did not surprise him much. He visited museums and department stores, but nothing really inspired him. He felt like he knew everything from the design magazine. One of the things that he was interested in during the trip was Marimekko. He had always been interested in Marimekko but he was deeply moved when he visited the design research in New York, which sold Marimekko at the time. Marimekko had a distinctive style with the base of print design. This encounter changed the direction of his trip and eventually his life.

After visiting London, he came to Copenhagen. His saving was getting less and less. He got a job offer to wash dishes, but he did not do it. He refrained and said, "If I went to work, I would not be here today. I would work for a while to make enough money to go home, I guess." He saw Marimekko again in Copenhagen, which made him decide to change his route. He left for Helsinki.

When he arrived in November, it was snowing heavily, and he was all excited. He went to Marimekko next day but could not see the founder, Armi Ratia right away. At that time, Katsuji Wakisaka was already working at Marimekko and helped Fujiwo with translating. Finally, he met Armi and he showed a catalogue that he made in Japan. There was no position of graphic designer at that time, but he was introduced to sister company, Decembre where Armi's son was in charge. He got three-week trial with pay. After one week, he got hired officially and they arranged him a visa. Decembre produced products and was doing the interior design of showrooms and stores. It was somewhat similar to what he was doing in Japan except wall painting. It was the first time for him to paint walls

and he still remembers clearly.

While working at Decembre from 1970 to 1974, his dream never disappeared. He wanted to become a print designer for Marimekko. He made suggestions once a year and he showed his designs twice. For the third time, he changed his method. He suggested his own project. He had a chance to visit a small village in Poland where women in the village paint their home and walls. He saw the pictures in the design magazine and he suggested that he go there for the inspiration research. His proposal went through and he travelled to Poland. He painted patterns and 3 designs were taken to the collection including Kuja (Fig. 14) and Talvikki. In Japanese, we say that truth reveals after third trial.

He had worked for Marimekko until he retired in 2000. He made more than 300 designs. He was famous for making designs rapidly. I asked him what he thinks about being a Japanese designer at Marimekko. "I always consider myself very Japanese. Knowing the history is very important and it is a starting point for the creation." He told me that he got very influenced by the Japanese paintings from the Edo period, especially Rimpa a group of painters from that time. Different painters have tried the same compositions over and over again. By doing so, painters have gained their original styles that differentiate from others. Fujiwo especially admires the works of Soutatsu Kawanaya (Fig. 13). Fujiwo liked the compositions and the way he paints plants. He also finds much love in the way he painted a puppy. He used to look at paintings when he was an art student. He thinks that the way he sees things, the shapes he makes are greatly influenced from this form.

Talking about Marimekko, Fujiwo thinks that there are some Japanese elements in Marimekko's designs in 1950s. This could be one reason why Marimekko accepted Fujiwo's design. At that time,



employees could purchase fabrics from archive by meter and he used to buy fabrics from 1950s. He even felt some connections between *Ukiyoe*.

He thinks his designs are ascetic. When he was young, he could not gain even though he really wanted. From this experience, he keeps distance from what he really wants, and this attitude reflects on his works. When he started his career at Marimekko, there were already great designers with strong originality. Nobody could paint like Maija Isola when she paints with brush. Katsuji Wakisaka has his own beauty with relaxed lines. He immediately thought about his strength and he took a thick magic pen. Originality rises when he thought about something which had never been done before.

It is sure that Fujiwo brought more Japanese

elements into Marimekko. He said he is stubbornly Japanese and his foundation has never changed after all these years. I thought his Japanese essence remains strongly because he has lived in Finland which is far away from Japan. I heard a story that in the dialect of Ie Island of Okinawa has very old Japanese that nobody else use anymore. Like a remote island, Japanese people who live abroad may develop their own way of Japanese culture by living thousands of kilometers away from home country. When you are away from home country, you are aware of the 'home country' more often and your internal imaginary home will be build, which sometimes differs from the current state of the home country because the culture itself is alive and constantly changing.

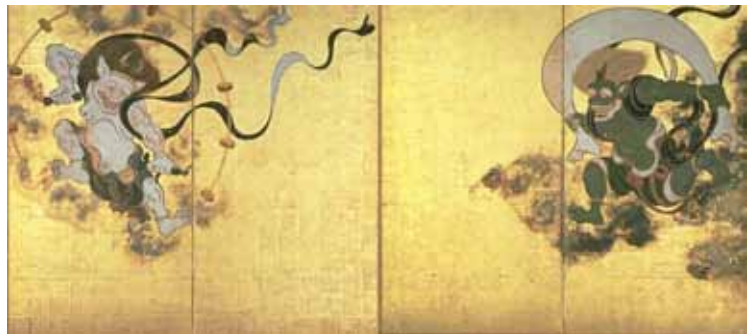


Fig. 13 Fujinraijin "Wind God and Thunder God", Sotatsu Tawaraya



Fig. 14 Kuja (1973), Fujiwo Ishimoto, Marimekko

## 2.2 Designer between two countries

Nowadays people move to another country more and more easily. I moved to Finland when I was 27 years old. I was born and grew up in Japan. When I started studying at University of Art and design Helsinki, I often received the same feedback on my work. My works are playful, cheerful and childish in a good way, which are supposed to be 'Japanese' elements.

When my print design from Marimekko came out, I asked the shop seller if the clothes with my print is selling well. The shop seller answered to me, "yes, it is selling well. Mostly Japanese customers buy them." I did not attempt to target Japanese customers but there is something Japanese in my designs, which will be rewarding to research what they are. One's design changes as time goes by as person gets older and changes. Nowadays both Finnish and Japanese elements can be found in my designs. What you see and experience influence in what you are making. I have spent 10 years in Finland and most of the inspirations come from the

changing sceneries of everyday life in Finland. But the aesthetic flavor stays the same.

Because of the unique condition that I am a Japanese designer living in Finland, one of my important roles as a designer is to connect between these two cultures as a messenger. Japanese and Finnish people are interested in each other's cultures and it is often said that there are similarities between these two such as modest and shyness. In spite of these minor similarities, Japan and Finland are very different in the social system such as hierarchy, welfare, gender equality, lifestyle and working environment, service, tradition and so on. More different we are, more interesting and stimulating and we can learn from each other since no nation is perfect. It is my lifework to work between these two cultures as a designer and give opportunities to people to get to know the different cultures and to look back where they are and how they can be to make something better.





Fig. 15 Omppu (2015) Eri Shimatsuka, Kippis

# 3. Collection making and brand studies

## 3.1 Interview with Noora Niinikoski, Head of Design at Nanso 14.03.2018

I did an interview with Noora Niinikoski, Head of Design at Nanso, a fashion brand from Finland (Fig. 16). Niinikoski has been appointed there at the current position for the past 3 years. Niinikoski had been running her own brand called Rinne Niinikoski for 10 years and has worked as Head of Fashion Design at Marimekko since 2011. Through the interview, she talked about the way she makes collections for Nanso (Fig. 17).

The work of a creative director covers wide area including concept making, scheduling, coordinating, deciding on the collection, analyzing sales and future planning. “It is all about the process and how to control it”, says Niinikoski about her work. Working at a brand gives Niinikoski already certain demands and starting points and she sees things from the point of view of the brand where she works. Now she works at Nanso, so she sees things through the filter of Nanso and make outfits which best represents the brand.

When Niinikoski starts a new collection, she tries to see the world full of curiosity to capture what interests her at the moment. The first thing she does it to make a color palette, then she thinks about the key product types, after which thoughts about the collection are gradually formed. For

color hunting, she looks around and pays attention to what is interesting influence from art exhibitions to street fashion. She also checks fashion weeks and sees what other brands offer at the moment for the research. During the research period certain color ideas are formed up and she gathers reference pictures and thinks about Nanso’s way of expression.

For Nanso fashion, considering the delivering is important. Within a collection, there are 2 – 5 deliveries which means about one delivery every 4 weeks. Each delivery is like a small Nanso collection and has about 30 products. It is important that these small collections have their own color palette but at the same time they have to match with other small collections because they are likely to be sold in the same shop. In a small collection, there is usually one main print design and some supportive ones. The main print works well if it contains at least 3 – 4 colors to create the atmosphere of the collection and more minimalistic designs with two colors and neutral colors such as white, black and gray support the main print. “It is a very logical process. I also think that creative director’s work is like creating music”, Niinikoski says.

At the moment, she invites a few print designers to share the ideas that she has been develop-



ing for the next collection. Niinikoski pays attention not to give too certain directions nor orders because she wants to give freedom for designer to explore their own way of working and expressing their creativity. Niinikoski thinks it is very important to keep a dialogue with designers.

It is also important to analyze the sales from last year and apply the information to the next season. The result of the analysis would be the base for the next collection. “It’s one of the most difficult things. It is important to make something which sells well but at the same time we must take the challenge in creating something new. Keeping a good balance between these things is essential”, she explains. Niinikoski also points out the importance of a brand’s certain recognizability. In keeping that, design should contain the same aesthetics. Surprise would be good element, but it is better to use the surprise as a spice. Using similar prints with new color combination is good way to keep the recognizability and at the same time bring a fresh feeling to it.



Fig. 16 Noora Niinikoski, Head of Fashion at Nanso

Niinikoski thinks that the trends do not change so quickly. Trends do not change every season. For the last decade, people have talked about the sustainability and it is getting to be more visible in how people dress. People are tired of fast fashion and want to wear clothes for a long time, which shows that more classic looks such as jeans and t-shirts have been seen for a long time in the trend. It seems like it is becoming a global norm of dressing up nowadays. “There are fast and slow trends. My work is to evaluate which trends to consider important for the brand. Nanso stands for long-lasting design and therefore fast trends are not the ones that I’m so much interested in. Many times, though it’s difficult to evaluate how long a trend lasts.”

Niinikoski has many ambitions for the current job. She still wants to make powerful change in creating the collection and bringing a new feel to the brand as a whole experience. For that, she would like to develop the store and online shop to make the brand more interesting.



Fig. 17 Sesam 2018SS, Reeta Ek, Nanso

### 3.2 Brand studies

Originality is one of the most important elements for building a strong brand. It is beneficial to do research on other brands who are in the same market. By examining other brands, it is possible to learn about originality and the demand on the market. It also shows how to position Pikku Saari in the market. For this section, 3 different types of Japanese brands have been selected; nani IRO, mina perhonen and Kippis. Print designs are essential in these brands. First two brands have been popular more than a decade and Kippis is new brand with similar background as Pikku Saari.

#### Nani IRO by Naomi Ito

Nani IRO (Fig. 18) is one of Kokka's brands started in 2002. It has been the most popular and

long-lasting brand of Kokka. Naomi Ito is originally a water-color painter and nani IRO is one of the pioneers to print on double gauze fabrics. When Ito started the brand, nobody was using the gauze fabric for home sewing fabric but nowadays it is a very common material to print on.

Nani IRO releases new collection in January every year. Usually the collection consists of the long-selling designs such as Pocho (Fig. 19) with new color combinations and several new designs. Nani IRO is sold in over 30 countries and fans of nani IRO are everywhere in the world.

When nani IRO was celebrating its 15th anniversary, Ito wanted to start selling the products also abroad. I helped with organizing this and participated in Design market during the Helsinki design Week in 2016. Although there are no shops which sell nani IRO's fabrics in Helsinki, quite many people came to the booth to show interests. Many



Fig. 18 Collection 2018 of nani IRO by Naomi Ito, Kokka

of them knew about the brand through Etsy and Instagram. In summer 2017, Naomi and her family came to Finland and we organized a pop-up store at Lokal Gallery in Helsinki. It was only a 4 day-happening, during which many nani IRO fans came in for shopping and it was a big success.

The distinctive water-color expression on the soft gauze material is the trademark of the brand. They have an atelier shop in Osaka and they have their own staff. Nani IRO is in constant collabo-

ration with other producers and produces various products such as children's clothing, women's clothing, container baskets and accessories. Nani IRO participates in many popular events and organizes an exhibition every year. Nani IRO continuously takes on new challenges such as collaborating with other artists and started a new brand with black and white concept. This constant renewal keeps attracting the fans.



Fig. 19 Pocho (2001), nani IRO by Naomi Ito, Kokka



## minä perhonen

This brand was established by Akira Minagawa in 1995 and the name was changed from Mina to minä perhonen in 2003. The originality of the brand derives from textile design – using various techniques such as weaving, print design and embroidery. Inspiration for the motives derives from observing what happens in society or from the poetic imagination from nature. It is one of the representative brand of Japan and has many fans between age 20 – 60. The brand also provides staff uniforms for Aomori Museum of Art and Tokyo Sky Tree observation tower. The brand has succeeded in marketing by international collabora-

tions. Minä perhonen has done collaborations with Scandinavian companies such as Danish Kvadrat, Finnish Artek, and Swedish Klippan Yllefabrik.

The characteristic of the brand is slow fashion. The main image and style of the brand has not changed much. They have produced a large number of print designs, but they have several strong designs which represents the brand such as butterfly (Fig. 21) and tambourine (Fig.22) which they use repeatedly in their own collections and also in collaborations with other producers.

The name is a mixture of designer's name and Finnish word perhonen which means but-



Fig.20 Ribbon, 2018 SS, minä perhonen

terfly. The designer has travelled in Scandinavian countries where he was impressed with nature, people and culture. He had a pop-up store at Artek in Helsinki in 2016. In his opening speech at Artek, he wanted to thank Fujiwo Ishimoto because Ishimoto's work gave him so much inspiration and encouragement. It seems like the fans of

minä perhonen also appreciate Finnish designs. Minä perhonen has a beautiful store in the 5th floor of Spiral building in Aoyama, Tokyo. They also sell products from Scandinavian countries. All the products are carefully selected, and the space has a beautiful harmony created by combining of Japanese and Scandinavian aesthetics.

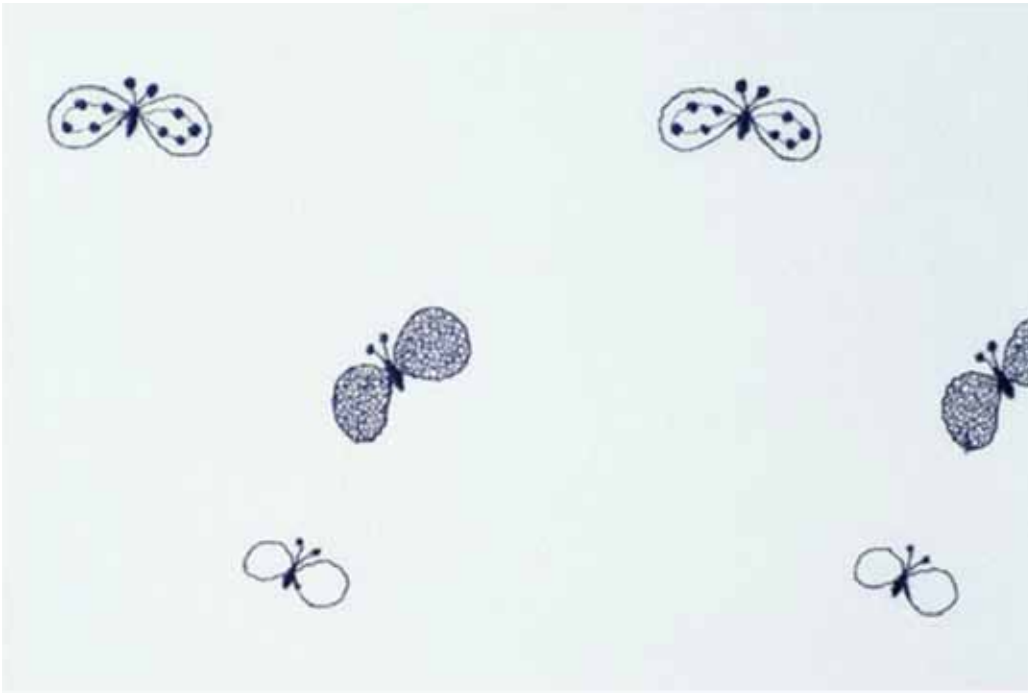


Fig. 21 Choucho (2001) minä perhonen by Akira Minagawa

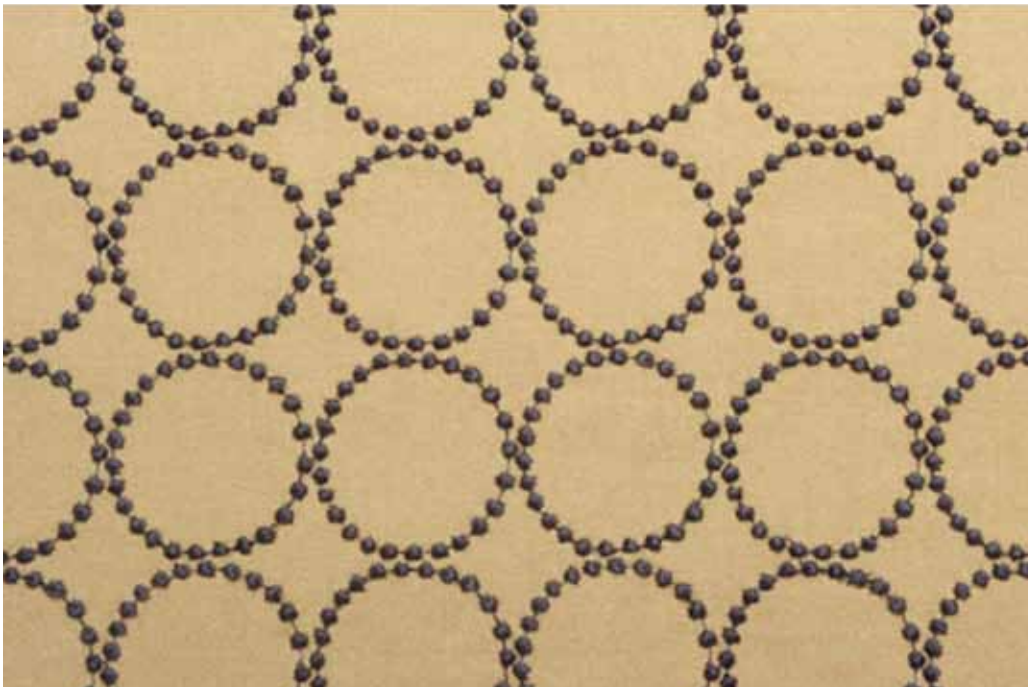


Fig. 22 Tambourine (2000) minä perhonen by Akira Minagawa

## Kippis

Kippis is a Japanese brand whose designs are inspired by Scandinavian design and lifestyle. It is a license brand business which Japanese publishing company Takarajima has established together with Itochu, a general trading company.

At the beginning in 2012, they wanted to have print design to use in the cover design of a schedule book and started a brand called Kippis. They wanted to use Marimekko's design but it was not possible, so they asked a graphic designer based in Helsinki to design one for them.

One of the editors had a chance to visit Helsinki during the press tour and saw works by many young talented designers at the Habitare fair. "I thought Kippis could make interesting products if they cooperated with these young designers. Since many of the Finnish textile brands, except for Marimekko, are not well known, I thought it would be

a chance to start a new brand. It is important to release new designs regularly and if some design becomes iconic, the design may take the brand to the next level", says Eriko Nemoto.

Marimekko is a Finnish company and they cannot just make designs only targeting the Japanese market. The publishing company Takarajima thought they may have a good chance because they can respond to what Japanese people want from Scandinavian designs.

The originality of Kippis design comes from colorways and print designs. To put it simply, Japanese fashion is quite conservative when it comes to colors but Kippis offers designs that suit even the conservative taste. "Our strength as a publisher of the fashion magazine is to sense the current trends quickly", said the producer, Eriko Nemoto.

Another feature of originality comes from



Fig. 23 Kippis collaborates with INIC and produces coffee products.

how Kippis presents the designs. Through each product, they always introduce Scandinavian lifestyle using advertisements in their magazine, have pop-up events at the shops, use catalogues and web presence. Scandinavian style designs are everywhere in Japan, so it is very important to emphasize that designs come from the lifestyle of the designers who live in Scandinavian countries. Stories of the print designs are introduced in the promotion items.

Kippis always receives positive reactions when they try collaborations in a new field where no

coffee (Fig. 23) and dishwashing liquid (Fig. 25). When they started the collaboration with Maruhanichiro which is specialized in preserved food, BS TV channel made a 10-minute feature about the brand.

They also make food products such as coffee and sauces in collaboration with food companies, and they comment about products as well as packages so that the result will be something reflecting Scandinavian food culture. The concept of the brand is not merely about design but also about making people's life richer.



Fig. 24 Mökki, Collection 2016AW





Fig. 25 Collaboration with Magica, Lion



Fig. 26 Salmiakki, Collection 2017 SS

### 3.3 Designers interview

There are quite a few Finnish designers who have worked with Japanese companies. Through the interview with Elina Rebers and Teija Puranen, I examine what Japanese companies expect from Finnish designers, what Finnish print design is and how the collaboration works.

#### Elina Rebers' interview 18.03.2018

##### 1 What kind of projects did you do in Japan?

"I have been working with two kinds of projects in Japan: Scandinavian Pattern Collection organised projects. These projects are also promotion for the Scandinavian Pattern Collection to make this brand more known in Japan. So far SPC has arranged three different projects where traditional Japanese handcraft meets Scandinavian design, for example *tenugui*, Japanese porcelain (pattern design for porcelain), Sashiko textile and now we are in the middle in the fourth project.

After each project, an exhibition is held in Japan or Sweden.

The main projects are cooperations with Japanese companies through SPC agents. My design has been used for umbrellas, porcelain, textiles, clothes and paper. My customers have been for example Uniqlo (Fig. 28), Ogawa, Nishigawa Sangyo, Argo Store and Loft."

##### 2 How did you get the opportunity?

"I have been working with Scandinavian Pattern Collection over four years."

##### 3 What do you keep in mind when you design something for the Japanese market?

"Storytelling and visual identity are important.

Patterns should also fit for different kind of purpose and target group."

##### 4 Do you express something Scandinavian in your design? What is Scandinavian for you?

"What I find important is my background, my memories, my visual identity, my way of living in Finland. I'm not thinking so much about Scandinavia when I'm making about patterns. I'm a Finnish designer and also proud of that."

##### 5 Do you think your print design is Finnish? In what way? Is there any difference in Scandinavian and Finnish design?

"I like to keep my design Finnish, but it is easier for someone else to say if my design is Finnish design or not.

My main inspiration is Finnish nature. I have been living on the West coast of Finland and our archipelago is an important place for me and it has a very strong influence on my visual identity.

If there is any difference in Scandinavian and Finnish design, it is a small one. Perhaps our design in Finland is simpler and more basic. In Sweden they are better at marketing their design than what we are here in Finland."

##### 6 Was there any difficulty with projects in Japan?

"No, I'm very glad that I have had these opportunities to work with them. I have learned a lot during these four years and grateful for that."

##### 7 Future plans?

"I would like to have also an agent in Europe and I will continue to cooperate with the Japanese."

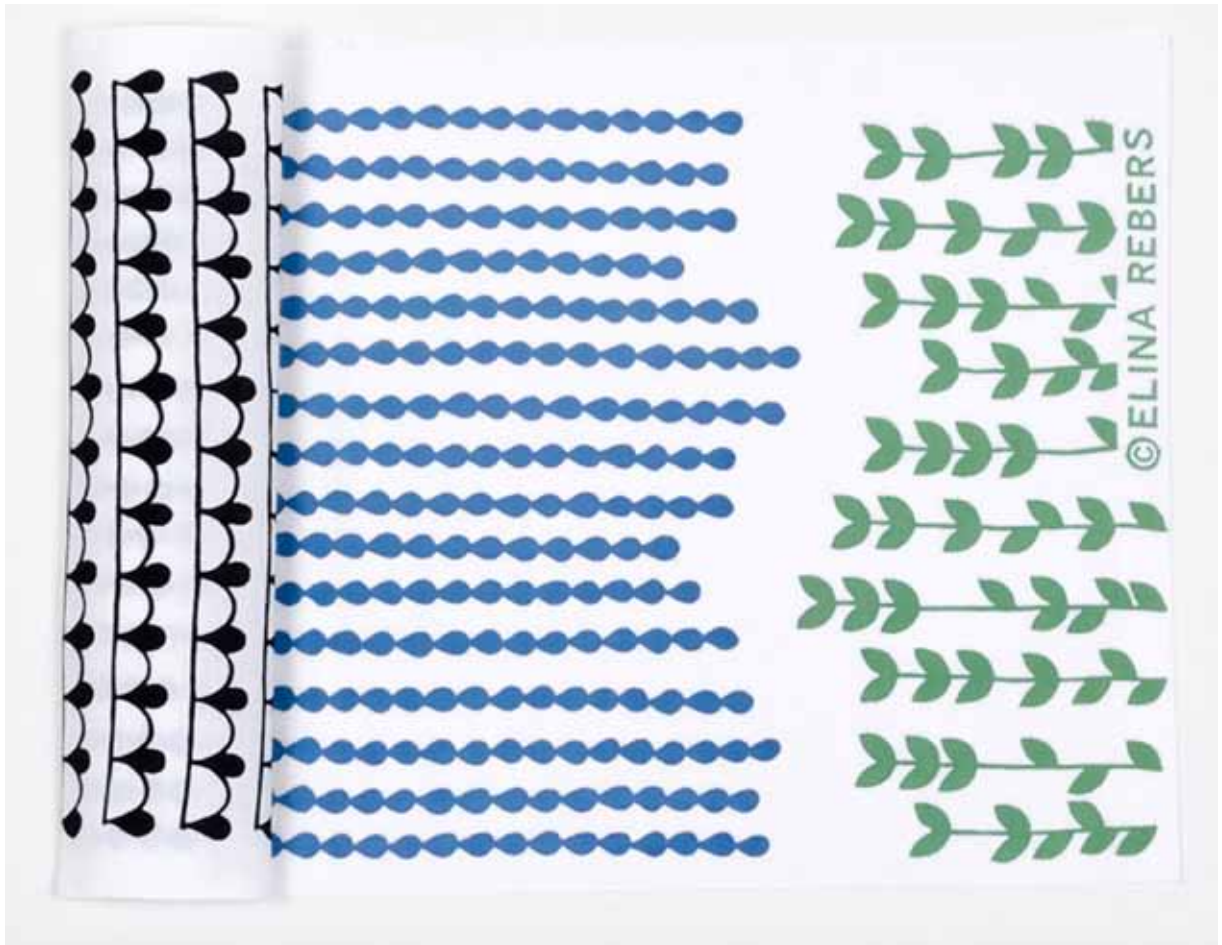


Fig. 27 Japanese traditional *tenugui* towel, Elina Rebers, Kamawanu 2014



Fig. 28 Collaboration with Uniqlo, Elina Rebers, Spring 2016



## Teija Puranen's interview

22.03.2018

### 1 What kind of projects did you do in Japan?

"I have a contract with a Japanese family company from Aichi-area that makes many kinds of textile products (Fig. 29 & 30). I suggest surface pattern designs to them and they choose designs to each season. I am also part of the marketing when I am in Japan to introduce the products to my customer company's customers and partners. Before that I have sold some individual surface pattern designs to Japan via a design agent."

### 2 How did you get the opportunity?

"The company was looking for a Finnish print designer for co-operation with their Finnish partner. The partner is an export and import agency and they asked names and suggestions from many places. After contacts by email and an interview

they chose me."

### 3 What do you keep in mind when you design something for the Japanese market?

"Somehow the designs should be recognized as Finnish or Nordic design. Something rough, hand-made feel or simplicity, maybe. But cuteness and softness are also important. I am still learning what they like and what would be interesting in Japan. The colorways also are better if they are quite cute and not too dark. It is also co-operation, as usual, so the design team in the company has their effect to the final designs, too. Eventually they then choose from my options what is most interesting to them and suggest colors, scales and make the final products."

### 4 Do you express something Scandinavian in your design? What is Scandinavian for you?



Fig. 29 Apollo, Teija Puranen, Sunrose 2018



“Well, I am not a very minimalistic designer and I feel they do not require that in Japan. If you would think that minimalistic design is Scandinavian. I have used many sketching techniques and styles. I believe I can experiment and be quite free if I want. My inspiration is often nature and plants and I like to keep the hand-made feel in the designs, that is maybe Scandinavian.”

**5 Do you think your print design is Finnish? In what way? Is there any difference in Scandinavian and Finnish design?**

“If I am Finnish and have had design work in Finland that is a sign for my Japanese customer that I am a Finnish designer. I feel I am quite versatile and I can experiment with not that Finnish stuff with other customers. For Japan I try both to be Finnish but especially be myself as they use my name in marketing and I do have freedom to be an artist and tell the stories behind the designs.

Sure, there is difference in Scandinavian and

Finnish design, in my opinion. Scandinavian is more free and decorative. To represent Finnish design is more restricted, I think. Stereotypical Finnish minimalistic design might be too cold for Japanese home market, I would think.”

(Finland is not part of Scandinavia but part of Nordic Countries but in Japan they do use Scandinavian term to express the feel.)

**6 Was there any difficulty with projects in Japan?**

“There is not much possibilities to proper communication and discussions, so there is lack of communication because of the language barrier. The idea of Finnish design is also flexible, and more knowledge and samples change it.”

**7 Future plans?**

“I hope the close co-operation with my customer carries on.”



Fig. 30 Karpalo, Teija Puranen, Sunrose 2018

## Summary

Both Nani IRO and minä perhonen are Japanese brand and have been popular for more than a decade. I learnt many important elements about creating and developing as a brand. First, the brand image and its concept need to be clear, unique and distinctive. Secondly, their products are both proudly made in Japan and internationally well-known. More and more people pay attention to where the products are made. In case of Pikku Saari, it makes sense to have the production take place in Japan as long as the market is Japan for the following reasons; it could support the highly skilled factories in Japan which are struggling to survive, and the price stays reasonable because transportation fee and custom tax are not needed. Both brands are opposite from fast-fashion. They produce new designs every year, but the silhouette and the brand image stay rather same. They use repeatedly same print designs in different colorways, materials and products. I hope Pikku Saari will be a long-lasting which will slowly develop.

Kippis points out that a unique collaboration that nobody has done before is a very effective way of marketing. Collaboration is a great tool to reach more users. Kippis is a Japanese brand but the designs are from Finland. The strength of the brand is that they know what Japanese people want. It does not make sense to make products that no one is interested from both economic and ecological perspectives. As a designer it is important to pay attention to what people are interested as well as what the designer wants to create.

Pikku Saari shares the same position as Kippis. The designs are from Finland and manufactured in Japan. Both Kippis and Pikku Saari produce fabrics by meters and share similar markets. When I visited large fabric stores, I witnessed that

the fabric of Kippis and Pikku Saari were placed to each other. Since they are direct competitors, I try to differentiate the expressions. For Kippis, my designs are more pop, playful, casual and easy-going. Usually I draw with pens and colorways are colorful. For Pikku Saari, I also paint with water-colour and cut paper besides pens. The design for Pikku Saari is as happy as the one for Kippis but I try to keep the atmosphere a bit more sophisticated and sensitive.

Both Finnish designers who have worked with Japanese companies live in the countryside of Finland and nature is a inspiration for their work. I believe that the way of living has an important influence on print designs and that is one thing which appeals Japanese customers. Teija points out that she tries to create something Finnish even though her style is quite versatile and not all the designs are so Finnish. Japanese customers do not necessarily seek for minimalism in Finnish design. From Teija's observation, cuteness and softness are the key words for Japanese market. It is important to know what the Japanese customers expect from a Finnish designer. Those would be a good starting point for the designs, and it is designers' task and challenge to create designs which are unique with their own taste and also meet the expectation from the customer.

The designer interviews revealed that Japanese clients expect certain Finnishness from the designer. The uniqueness of Pikku Saari is that the designs are inspired by the lifestyle and nature from Finland and expressed with my artist expression. That is my Finnish twist in my design and one of the elements which make my brand distinguish from others.





Fig. 31 Inspiration piture - small island on the lake

## 4. Pikku Saari, textile brand in Japan

### 4.1 The beginning of the brand

In August 2014, I got an offer from a Japanese company to start my own textile brand. The name of the company is Kokka (Fig. 32). They specialize in manufacturing apparel clothing and home sewing fabrics. Kokka has worked with various artists and designers to have original textile brands.

In their homepage Home Sewing is described as following:

“Variety of crafting fabrics and supplies—designing, development, and sales specified to crafts stores and retail businesses. Not limited to KOKKA original fabrics, together with textile brands and authors such as— “nani IRO” and “echino”—we accentuate developing products by way of aggressive collaboration among textile brands, authors, and creators.” (Kokka 2018)

They have a presentation of the new designs three times a year. They have Spring and Summer collection in January, Autumn and Winter collection in June and collection for new school term in September. Most of the designer collaboration is present in their new collections in January.

One collection consists of three to four designs and there are usually three or four color variations. Kokka gives free hands to the designer to build a brand and collection. Kokka respects the creativity of the designers and artists. They are in charge of the production and take care of the sales. If the sales seem to be difficult, some collaboration finishes after one year. Nani IRO is one of the successful brands of Kokka and it celebrated 15th anniversary in 2016.



Fig. 32 from the website of Kokka

## 4.2 Concept

When I started to work with Kokka in 2014, I made a bubble map to collect ideas for developing the concept. It was obvious to make a brand inspired by everyday life in Helsinki because that is something unique that Japanese people would be interested in. Through the brand, I would like to eventually tell about culture, lifestyle and values in Finland.

Helsinki is surrounded by the sea and islands. I did not have much of a culture shock when I moved to Finland, but I found the notion of the sea totally different in Finland. Japan consists of four main islands surrounded by two oceans. The Baltic Sea is not so salty, it usually has no big waves, no open horizon, which makes it far from what I think of the sea. I wanted to pick up those small surprises into the brand making.

Pikku Saari is inspired by the lifestyle of Helsinki, the capital of Finland. I really like the size of the city. One of the great things about Helsinki is that it is close to the nature. After riding a few stops on the metro, you will see nature in front of you. I grew up in Tokyo where all you see from the window of the train is continuous houses and buildings. It takes at least one hour or more to see some nature. I feel lucky to be able to enjoy nature while living in the city.

There are four seasons in Finland as well as in Japan. But it does not feel the same way. In Japan, the four seasons has pretty equal amount while in Finland winter feels very long and summer is just an instant like an illusion. Also, the amount of light in Finland is extreme from summer to winter, which affects many things mentally and physically. Living in the north gives so much space for ideas and inspirations for the brand.

I named the brand Pikku Saari. It is pretty easy to pronounce for anyone in the world and it sounds nice in Japanese. Pikku Saari means small island in Finnish. There are many small islands in Helsinki and this is reflected in the concept of the brand. Another secret reason is that my family name means “landmark of island”. I thought that the brand is like a small part of me because all the ideas are coming from my life and experiences.

## 4.3 Inspiration

Inspiration comes from everywhere but as far as the concept of the brand is life in Helsinki, I restrict that the inspiration is limited to the ones related to Finland so that the visual image is well matching with the concept.

For the first collection, the theme was home party on the garden. To celebrate the birth of Pikku Saari, I wanted to create a happy feeling for the first collection. The collection is made of three designs; Saaristo (Archipelago), Piirakka (Pie) and Metsämarjoja (Forest Berries).

The second collection was about the instant summer and changing moments. Summer in Finland is beautiful but short. Everyone is ready to enjoy the short summer as much as possible. The collection captures the feeling of the Finnish summer. In the collection 2016, there are Pisaraita (stripe of drops), Parveke (veranda) and Kauppatori (open market).

The newest collection is about to be released in June is about slowing down and capturing the beauty of the surroundings. Spending time in the summer cottage (Fig.33 & 34) by a lake is such a primitive way of life and at the same time the most refreshing experience. Modern life is apart from



the nature and the time spent at a summer cottage helps people with bring nature back into their lives. The collection consist of three new designs such as Käsityö (handcraft), Järviä (lakes) and Kukinto (bloom) and one from the previous collection Pisaraita (stripes of drops).



Fig. 33 summer holiday at a Finnish cottage



Fig. 34 drawing berries in the forest

## 4.4 Collaborations – Urban Research, Stacksto

*Brands should provide not only products but also intangible values such as differentiation, uniqueness and rarity to be selected by consumers. To provide such intangible values, fashion brands need to promote sensibility marketing strategies. Collaboration has become an important strategy to pursue high value and sensual benefit.*

(Kim, Ko, Lee, Mattila & Hoon Kim 2014)

Kokka is selling fabrics only by meters, which means it is more about the materials than products. Target customers are the ones who do home sewing, so it is quite a limited market. In Japan, it is common that mothers prepare hand-made bags for children who go to the kindergarten. It is one of the biggest demands for the fabrics by meters. DIY is getting more and more popular but not everyone is familiar with home sewing. Collaboration is a very effective way to reach a wider range of people.

Pikku Saari has two collaboration projects at the moment. One is with the brand Urban Research, which is a selection shop for clothing and they also collaborate with textile designers of Kokka. Urban Research has about 50 stores in total in major cities in Japan. The concept of the brand is that they research cities around the world and offer both clothing and *zakka* based on the casual taste. They are making an umbrella series with four different textile designers from Kokka, which will launch in the spring 2018.

Another collaboration has been done together with Stacksto which specializes in producing container boxes and baskets, which started in 2008. The idea of their brand come from French taste and Japanese wisdom. Their products are designed to use the small living space in Japanese houses in

and effective way with detailed French product making. One of their leading products is container box named as Baquet and they have done collaborations with SOU•SOU, Lisa Larsson, nani IRO and Moomin. For the new collaboration, Pikku Saari and Mogu Takahashi will join in 2018 (Fig. 35).

How to find the collaborators? One of the effective ways is holding the exhibitions. In 2017 Kokka had an exhibition “knot” which was targeted for professionals. The two-day exhibition was held in June and selected brands of Kokka showed their products to the audience. The purpose of the exhibition is to connect the brands and the buyers from different fields. I went to Tokyo to participate in the exhibition. It was a great opportunity to meet different companies. I will speak more about the exhibitions as a way of promoting my own brand later in my thesis. Collaboration has not started directly from the exhibition, but continuous presentation is significant.



Fig. 35 Collaboration with Stacksto, 2018

## 4.5 Paper products – Letter Book and Scratch Art

### Letter Book from Scandinavia

Pie International is a publishing company which is specialized in design and art books. While I was testing to be a freelancer, I coordinated and wrote several books with them including Marimekko notebook, Arabia notebook, Erik Bruun, Master designers from Finland, Marimekko in patterns and interior of designers' home from 2012 to 2014. It was the peak of the Scandinavian boom in Japan and no more books were made after that. I got an offer to participate in a letter book of Scandinavian designers in 2017 (Fig. 36 & 37). Letter book is a book whose leaf can be torn off and used as a letter paper. It is a series, which books

were made by different editors including pattern from designers in Paris, Liberty print and William Morris. The editor of Pie International chose 50 designs from 7 designers; Aino-Maija Metsola, Sanna Annukka, Hanna Konola, Piia Keto, Polka, Matti Pikkujämsä and me. Three of ten designs are from Pikk Saari. This is one example of how people in Japan categorize Scandinavian print designs. Designers are either from Finland or related to Finland, but the title of the book uses *hokuo* (Scandinavia) because that way it would get more attentions.



Fig. 36 'A letter book of Scandinavian designers' Pie International, 2017



Fig. 37 'A letter book of Scandinavian designers' Pie International, 2017



## Scratch art

In the beginning of January in 2018, I got an offer from a publishing company, Gakken. Gakken is known for educational publications, but their business covers many areas from education to elderly services. One of their newest products is called Scratch art (Fig. 38). People are getting tired of the increasing amount of PC jobs; they miss some activities using their hands. In the several past years, coloring books have been extremely popular in Japan among women and the boom has also been seen internationally. Scratch book is part of the same trend, and Gakken has been

the first company to invent these products in Japan. Scratch art means that you make your own art by scratching a sheet by a pointy tool. Many have done this kind of handcraft in kindergarten and somehow it is familiar and nostalgic. My task is to create 6 pieces of postcards of ‘*hokuo*’ patterns (Fig. 39). Four of the designs are chosen from Pikku Saari. There will be an explanation of the Pikku Saari on the products. This product will be sold at bookstores all around Japan, which may hopefully bring more interests to the Pikku Saari brand.



Fig. 38 Scratch art of Japanese traditional patterns



Fig. 39 Scratch art of Scandinavian time, 2018

## 4.6 Marketing

My task is not only to design collections but also marketing and PR. When the collection is ready, I need to design promotional items which will be used at the sales exhibition. Promotional items may be clothing, kitchen items, interior design and so on. The purpose of the promotional items is to show customers what they could make from the fabric.

Photographs of the promotional items and textiles are very important tool to express the brand and strengthen the story of the brand. I make small flyers of new collection with image pictures. In the flyer, there are close-up pictures of the fabric, image pictures and a short story of each design. Image pictures are placed at the events, sales exhibition and solo exhibitions.

## 4.7 Media

There are several online interview articles about me which has worked very well for raising awareness of the brand. A Japanese writer living in Finland interviewed me for Cinra, a web magazine for professionals and Cinra (Fig. 40) published a

long article telling thoroughly about how I moved to Finland and how I have become a textile designer. Some people found and contacted me through the website.

There is another web magazine called Haconiwa (Fig. 41) which is especially for women working in the creative field. They have interviews about women working in creative professions and, they even have pages that introduce the coming events. My exhibition was introduced at their website and brought many visitors to my exhibition. They also have an interview about my career and life in Finland.

To appear in the suitable websites which readers' interests match my works and life would be an amazing marketing tool. Key topics would be such as Scandinavian design, life in Finland, working abroad and textile design.

At the moment, Pikku Saari has no website of its own. There are some introduction pages on Kokka's website. It is my next ambition to make an independent brand website so that people could find the brand and its stories more easily.



Fig. 40 Web article of Cinra, 2016



Fig. 41 Web article for Haconiwa, 2017

## 4.8 Originality of the designer

As a freelance designer, I work with several different brands both in Finland and Japan. In Finland, I offer my designs to Marimekko, Samuji and Vimma. In Japan, I regularly offer my designs to Kippis and I produce my own label Pikku Saari.

Some designers narrow down their way of expression to strengthen the originality. People know right away whose design it is at the first sight. Sanna Annukka, a half Finnish, half British designer based in London has a distinctive style of designs and she has the same tone when she designs for Marimekko, book cover or her own prints (Fig. 42 & 43). This strategy is often seen in illustrators such as Lotta Nieminen, Klaus Haapaniemi and Kustaa Saksi.

On the other hand, some designers do not have restricted styles, but the way of expressions varies from time to time. Fujiwo Ishimoto men-

tioned in the interview that he was not allowed to stick to a certain style of designs as he was an in-house designer. Besides he got bored easily so it suited his personality to continue creating new things. Erja Hirvi has offered her designs for Marimekko over 20 years and her creation is always with full of surprises. She has many different ideas and uses various techniques to achieve her ideas. Lumimarja for Marimekko is a great example (Fig. 44). She brought a branch of a tree to the Artwork Studio. It was scanned, and berries were painted and added later. Erja is involved with the fashion brand, Samuji and created many fashion prints (Fig. 45). Erja's print designs for Samuji is somehow more abstract and dynamic movement than ever, which seems like the new side of Erja was pulled out. Working with different clients' challenges designers and new and fresh designs could be born.



I am also the second type of designer. Like a person grows up and changes, it is natural that the design is also changing. Of course, originality is the essential element of the designers, but I would always take the challenge of creating something new and offer fresh ideas and images. Characteristics of my designs are playful, cheerful and happy.

I also keep the feeling of my hand drawings so that the design contains some handcraft elements. While keeping these core elements, I will continue explore more to develop my own designs for Pikku Saari.



Fig. 42 Lintu I, Sanna Annukka



Fig. 44 Lumimarja (2004), Erja Hirvi, Marimekko



Fig. 43 Talvitarina 2016 AW, Sanna Annukka, Marimekko



Fig. 45 Babette 2018 Rerort, Erja Hirvi, Samuji

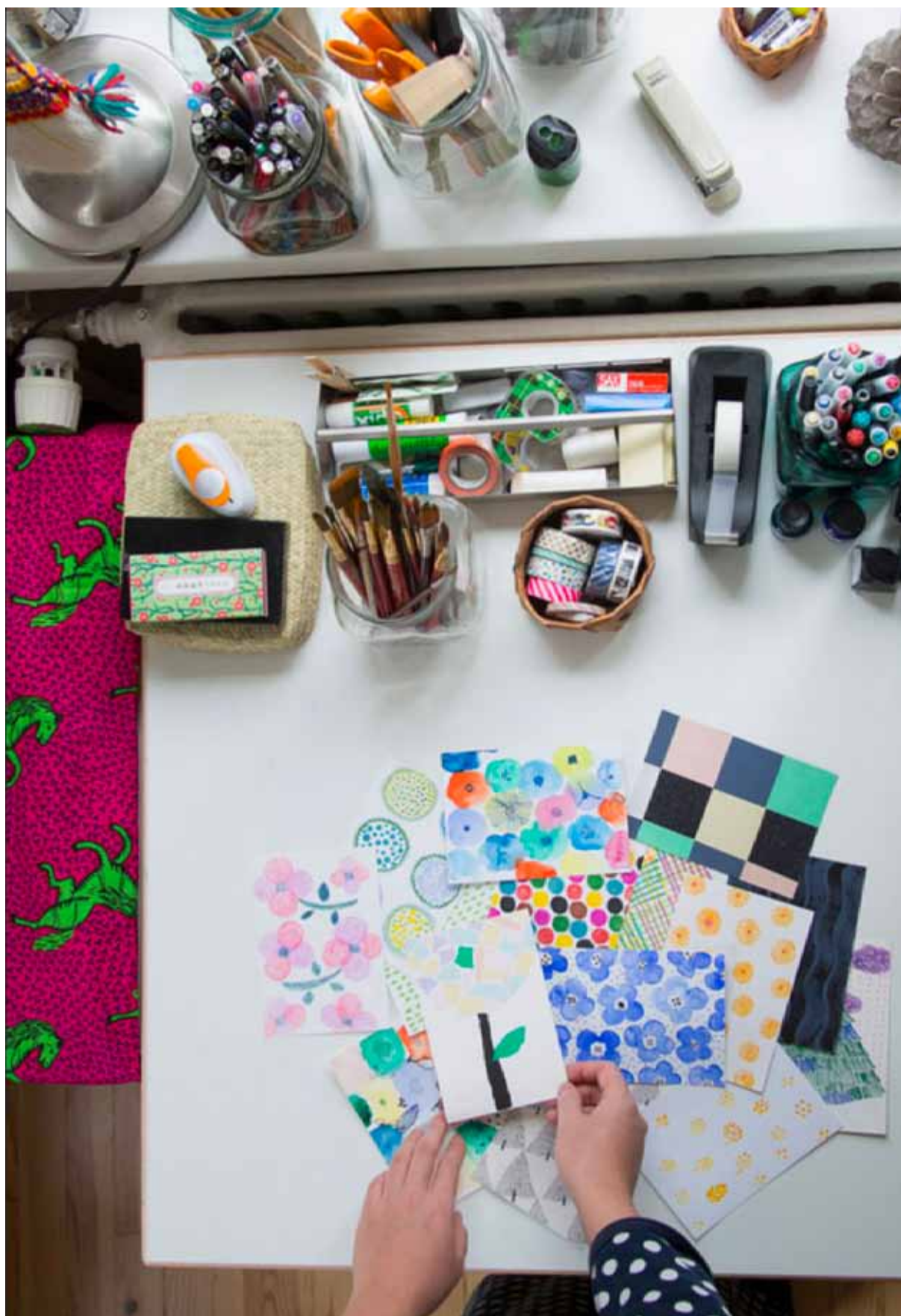


Fig. 46 Collections of postcards

# 5. Design Process

## 5.1 Sketching

Katsuji Wakisaka is one of the designers that gave me much inspiration. When he was in his 20s, he came all the way to Finland changing flights and trains only to challenge himself at Marimekko. He was lucky to meet Armi Ratia who saw some potential in Katsuji's works even though he did not even speak much English at that time. He became the first Japanese Marimekko's designer and worked from 1968 to 1976. Since he was a city boy from Kyoto, he got tired of living in Helsinki and moved to NY. Since he returned to Kyoto in 1980s and he has drawn a postcard every day to his wife. The amount of the cards is over 10000 - he uses the ideas for the textile designs for SOU•SOU which a textile brand from Kyoto is where he is the main textile designer since 2003.

When I was working at Artwork Studio at Marimekko, I had a chance to work on Katsuji's old design from archive. I scanned the films and made a digital data by modifying the repeat for the fashion print. I contacted him for the first time and we met him and his wife in Kyoto, 2012. At that time, I was wondering if I should return to my old workplace or become a freelance designer. He told me that he went to listen to the lecture of King of Bhutan. Katsuji said to me, "The king said that everyone has a dragon in his / her heart. I hope you will find your own dragon."

He also showed me piles of postcards that he has drawn every day. I was very impressed at the small great works and thought it was a brilliant way of creating new ideas. According to him, the paper quality of Japanese postcard made by post office is very good for drawing and painting. He also explained to me that idea comes more naturally when he is drawing a postcard for someone, in his case to his wife. I asked him if I can use this method and he said, "Please, please." Since then I started drawing postcards not every day but when I need to design for some projects (Fig. 46).

This method is amazing in many ways. First, it is very fast and handy to make many ideas. I could work on anywhere at home or on a trip. Usually ideas spread from one postcard and more inspiration comes. Sometimes I draw from some ideas in my head and sometimes I draw without thinking. Strokes look good when I try not to achieve anything. If it is a small repeat, the postcard-size sketch is enough. If the sketch is a part of some bigger image, it is challenging to draw the same kind of lines which was on those postcards because same feeling does not necessarily come out. Secondly, it is a great tool in making a collection. One can easily try different combinations with separate cards and these cards help creating the visual image of the new collection.



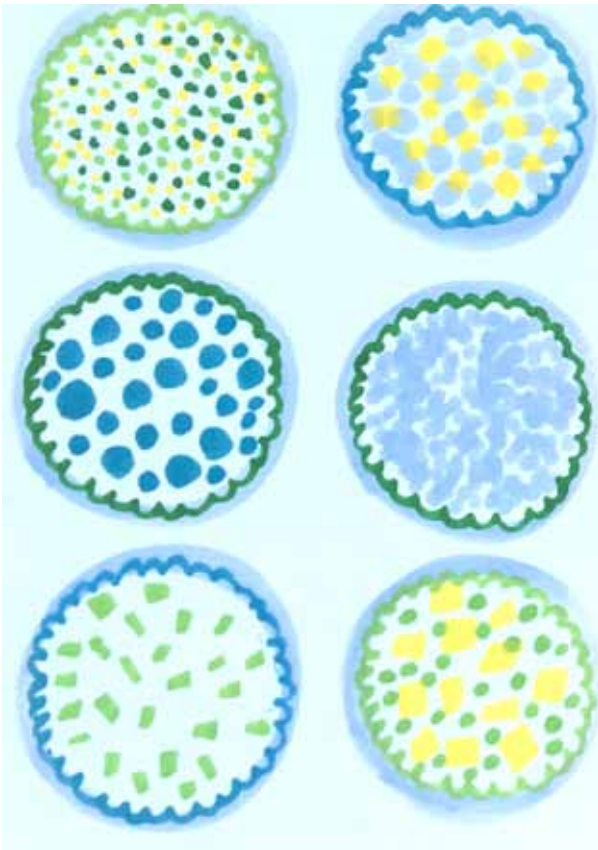


Fig. 47 Sketch for Piirakka (2015)



Fig. 48 Sketch for Pisaraita (2016)

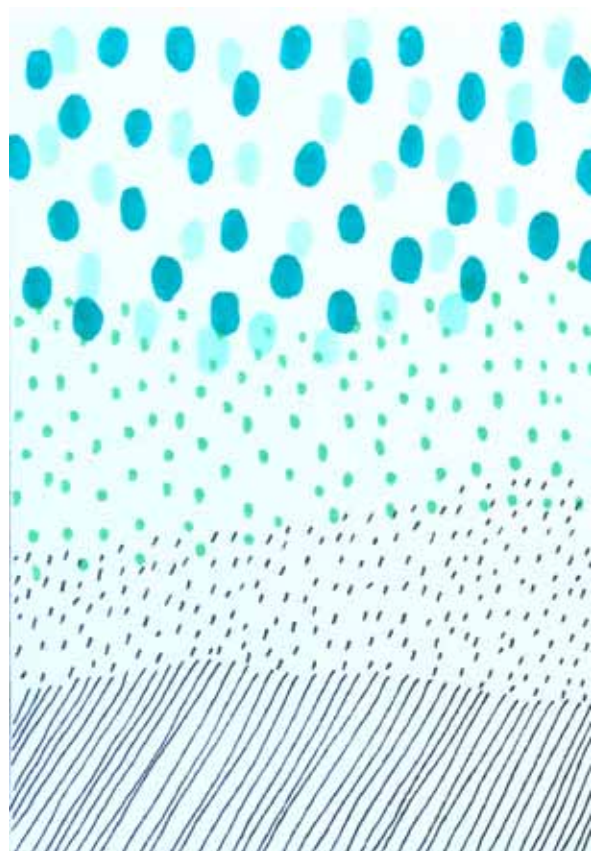


Fig. 49 Sketch for Pisaraita (2016)



Fig. 50 Sketch for Järviä (2018)



Fig. 51 Suggestions for the collection (2018)



Fig. 52 Suggestions for the collection (2018)

Fig. 51 - 52 These designs were not selected for the collection.



## 5.2 Making a collection

Collection making takes place usually 6 months before the release. The first thing is to decide a theme. Then I start collecting words to describe the theme. Postcard method is very beneficial when making a collection as mentioned earlier. I look for suitable images from my postcard archives for the theme. I draw more postcards to add ideas if needed. Then I show 5 – 6 suggestions to Kokka. Kokka respects the designer's ideas as much as possible and usually give feedback from the perspective of the sales. Then we decide 3 – 4 designs for the collections. After the designs are decided, I will make the repeat of the design and make files ready. Then I start thinking about colors.

This is not exactly a fashion nor interior textile collection. It is something in between because I try to choose materials which could be used for both fashion and interior. I will explain more about the materials in Chapter 5.5. Designs are different enough that could appeal to many people and at the same time same enough to be seen as one collection. It is difficult to assume how people use the fabric, so I tend to choose the sizes which could be suitable for both fashion and interior. Japanese people prefer to use something small especially on the clothes.

As I learnt from Noora's interview, it is important to keep something common between the new and the previous collections to strengthen the image of the brand. Some spice is good but not too much. I had hard time working on my third collection. I felt the need to break what I had made before and produce something totally new. I went to show Noora the ideas and her advice made me realize the importance of the continuing image that the brand already has. Noora said, "there is always something happy and playful in your design so is in the brand, so you should keep it as the main image. Then you can add something new in a smaller scale."

Print designer and the creative director's point of view is quite different. Print designers work is to create interesting images as much as possible. As a creative director, you have to see the designs objectively and create the balanced picture of the collection. In a way, a creative director should step back and see the unity of the collection. For Pikku Saari, my task is to design print designs and to make a collection. It is sometimes challenging to see your own designs objectively, but it is inevitable.

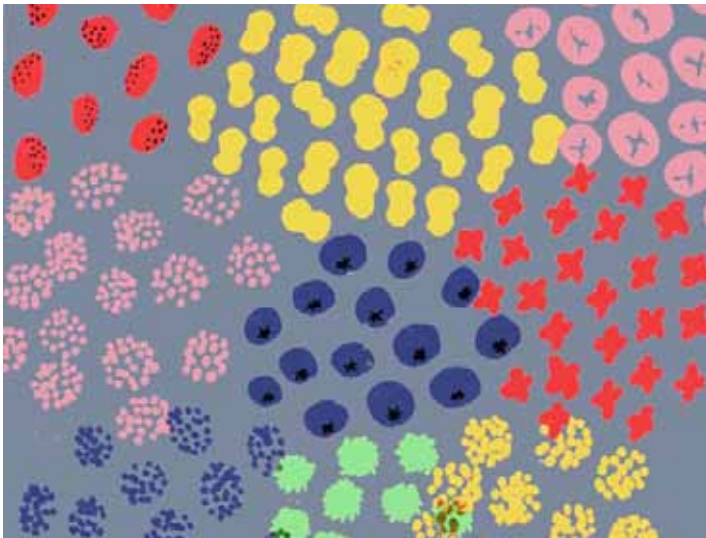


Fig. 53 Sketch for Metsämarjoja (2015)

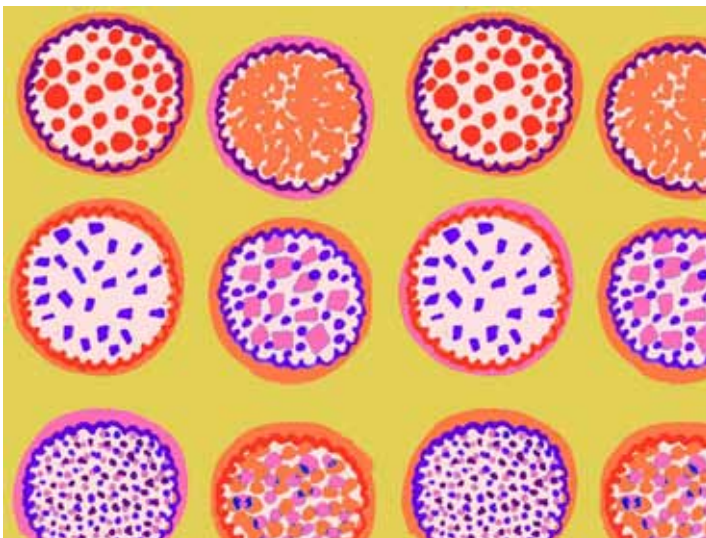


Fig. 54 Sketch for Piirakka (2015)



Fig. 55 Sketch for Saaristo (2015)



Fig. 56



Fig. 57



Fig. 58



Fig. 59



Fig. 60



Fig. 61

Fig. 56 - 61 Suggestions for the collection. These designs were not selected to the collection.

### 5.3 Colorways

After the designs are determined, I try colorways. Color combination is one of the most important in print design. Kristina Isola had worked for Marimekko for a long time and she is very talented in using colors. She said once, that color could ruin the whole designs, so the color combination is as important as the design itself. Pikku Saari has usually 3 – 4 different color variations for each design. There are several colorways in order to meet different customers' needs. I work on the computer screen to try many colorways and select about 5 – 8 combinations to do the test. About the final colorways, I decide the selections reflecting the opinions from Kokka in terms of the sale.

For the color communication, I use Pantone for textile. It is not the best but the most effective way. The artist of nani IRO has her own color swatches made from all the fabric samples. I would also like to make my own colors swatches.

There are several things to consider when I make color combinations. My collections are mainly targeted for women, girls, boys and babies.

The colorway consists of the main color, neutral color, color which gives different feelings from others and color which would work for both girls and boys. It is important to have one representative colorway. It could be multicolor and bold. Other colorways could complement the main color. Designs become something else by changing colors. By using various colorways, it could reach wider range of customers. I should pay attention that colorway become too feminine because there are certain colors which most boys would never use like pink. I personally think people should choose whatever they like and are free from gender stereotypes. There are so many gender stereotypical colors in the market like pink for girls and blue for boys. I would like to avoid that and create colors which would attract both girls and boys.

Since the fabric is sold all around the year, it is better to avoid colorways which are very seasonal. It is ideal that the four colorways have own feelings so that the design look in different ways.



Fig. 62





Fig. 63



Fig. 64





Fig. 65



Fig. 66

Fig. 62 - 66 Combinations of the colorway for sample prints

## 5.4 Schedule

### 1 Select the new design and colors

It takes about 2 – 3 weeks to make screens and make samples.

### 2 Sample sent to Finland

Samples are sent to Finland. If resample is necessary, it takes another 1 – 2 weeks

### 3 Mass production

It takes about 4 - 6 weeks

### 4 Fabrics ready

Making promotion items and photo shoots for the catalogue

## 5.5 Choosing materials

Kokka has various types of fabric including fashion and interior. I choose natural fabrics such

as cotton and linen which are familiar in Finland and Japan. In my collection, I select different thicknesses of the fabric so that people can use the fabric variously from dress to cushion cover depending on their needs. They are usually soft cotton double gauze, rather thick cotton-linen like canvas and semi-thick cotton-linen fabric.

Double gauze has become a typical Japanese fabric for home sewing. It is very soft and suitable for clothes and accessory such as pouch and handkerchief and scarf. People prefer double gauze for baby products. Cotton-linen canvas fabric can be used for interior accessories such as cushion covers, apron, potholder, table cloth, curtain, upholstery and even clothes like trousers and jacket. Semi-thick cotton-linen fabric is good for both interior and fashion.



Fig. 67 Material samples



## 5.6 Color samples and adjustment

3 - 4 weeks after you send the files and give the direction of Pantones, samples arrive. They are usually small patches about 30cm x 30cm. I decide the final colorways and make corrections of the colors. At this point, I do not compare with Pantone chip because it is more important to see the atmosphere of the fabric than the color is precisely printed as Pantone.

I receive the sample again after 2 – 3 weeks. Most of the case the sample looks fine at this stage and mass production starts after the confirmation. Kokka usually print 2000 meters per design. That is the minimum amount if they want to keep the current price. They order more if the fabric sells well. Sales person at Kokka decides the number of meters they print for each colorway.



Fig. 68 Color samples for Kukinto (2018)

## 5.7 Visiting factories

Marimekko is proud of having the printing factory next to the main office. After having worked as a designer working at the Art Work Studio, I admit that it was a great environment for designers. This is one disadvantage for me to work with Japanese companies. Production is so far away that I do not know fully what kind of factories they are and what they are good at.

In order to get to know the factory, I visited a print factory in Wakayama in Autumn 2016. Screen printing was the main tool at the factory and the printing machines in Japan look quite different from what I knew from Marimekko. It was great to meet the people who are in charge of sample making and printing since I have never contacted them directly. We have discussed about

overlapping, the size of the repeat and so on. Unfortunately, the factory finished their business at the beginning of the year. Textile production in Japan has been decreasing rapidly and I would like to contribute in producing in Japan as much as possible. I would like to visit other print factories to discuss what could be done to make unique prints.

## 5.8 Promotion samples

It is my task to decide what kind of promotion samples to make. For the first collection, I designed everything from the beginning. Based on my drawing, Japanese pattern maker made a pattern and made a sample. The sample is introduced at the sales exhibition and the buyers can bring the

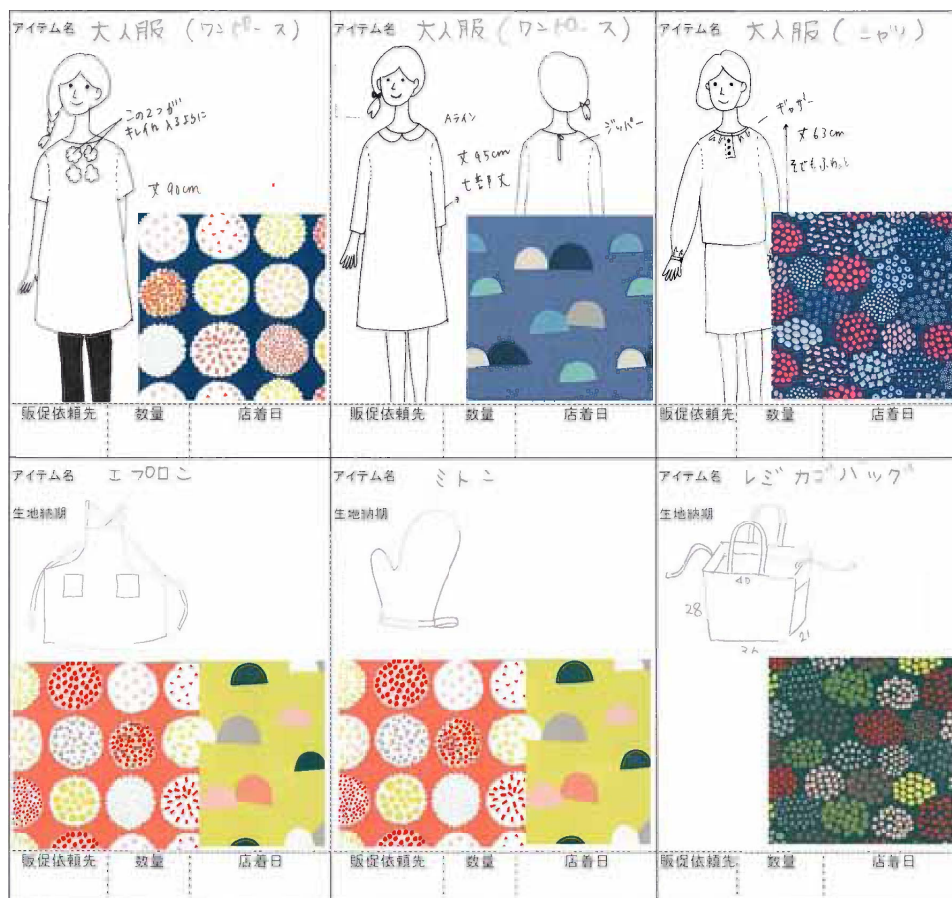


Fig. 69 Sketch for the promotion items, 2015

recipe for the sample to make their own promotion samples. For the second collection, I chose from Kokka's archive because of the lack of time. I would like to do the collaboration with Finnish fashion designer or product designer to make some unique promotion samples in the near future.

## 5.9 Photo shoots and catalogue

When the promotion samples are ready, they are sent to Finland for the photo shoots. My husband is an architect, but he has taken photography for his work and hobby. We have worked together to make a look book.

For the first collection, the home party was the theme. We made a set at the old villa where our relative used to live. It was a beautiful summer day

and we succeeded in capturing the happy feeling of the Finnish summer, which suits perfectly the theme of the collection.

We had to take photos during the winter time for the second collection. It was dark and no greens nor flower. Only possible place was inside the house. We went to the house where my husband's cousin lives in Inkoo for the photo shoots.

Summer is the best time of the year for the photo shoots because it captures the atmosphere of Finland that I want to express in the fabric such as forest, summer cottage and market and it is very challenging to take photos in the dark season with the natural light. Ideally photo shoots should be done during May and October at the latest. Timing of the production has to be decided based on the photo shooting, which is not always easy.



Fig. 70







## 5.10 Collection

Here are the descriptions of each collection and print designs. I use these sentences in the catalogue to introduce each design. Catalogues are given at the various events including my exhibition. Each design has a small story and it is an important communication tool to tell these stories in the paper media and also on the web or the purpose of branding and marketing.

### Collection 2015

For the first collection, the theme was home party in the garden. To celebrate the birth of Pikku saari, I wanted to create some happy feeling for the first collection. The collection is made of three designs; Saaristo (Archipelago), Piirakka (Pie) and Metsämarjoja (Forest Berries).

#### **Saaristo (Archipelago)**

##### **cotton-linen canvas, cotton 85% & linen 15%**

Saaristo means archipelago in Finnish. There are small islands floating on the shiny sea. Abstract and simple design printed on the thick cotton-linen suits well in the interior. This island is used for the logo on Pikku Saari and became one of the trading mark of the brand.

#### **Metsämarjoja (Forest Berries)**

##### **Cotton double gauze, cotton 100%**

Forest where you can find many different kinds of berries. This soft material can wrap the freshly baked bread or it can be placed on the basket. You can simply wrap on your neck as a scarf.

#### **Piirakka (Pie)**

##### **Cotton ox, cotton 100%**

People in Finland love berry pie with freshly picked berries. That is one of the best food in summer. After eating the pie, everyone has a violet mouth. There are many different types of pies in the design and will add happy color to the daily life.





Fig. 73 Saaristo (2015) for Pikku Saari





Fig. 74 Piirakka (2015) for Pikku Saari





Fig. 75 Metsämarjoja (2015) for Pikku Saari





Fig. 76



Fig. 77



Fig. 79



Fig. 78



Fig. 80





Fig. 81





Fig. 82





Fig. 83



Fig. 84

(Fig. 76 - 84 Represent pictures for the catalogue, collection 2015)

## Collection 2016

The second collection was about the instant summer and changing moments. Summer in Finland is beautiful but short. Everyone is ready to enjoy the short summer as much as possible. The collection captures the feeling of the Finnish summer. In the collection 2016, there are Pisaraita (stripe of drops), Parveke (veranda) and Kauppatori (Open market).

### **Kauppatori (Open market)**

#### **Cotton-linen canvas, cotton 85% & linen 15%**

There are many markets in Helsinki and always crowded with the local customers. Under the fresh orange tent lays full of berries, mushrooms and vegetables, which makes me excited. Fun detail designs with big and fat seagulls, open café and hand-crafts.

### **Pisaraita (Stripe of drops)**

#### **Cotton-linen, cotton 85% & linen 15%**

Drops fallen from the sky change their shapes depending on the seasons. Spring rain dissolves the snow, summer rain grows plants with the help of the sun, autumn rain makes mushroom bigger, and the winter snow makes the dark scenery much brighter. This design expressed the transition from rain to snow as the season changes.

### **Parveke (Balcony)**

#### **Cotton Double Gauze, Cotton 100%**

Around mid-summer, people decorate their balcony with small flowers. It is such a short time when you can grow flower in the north but it is one of the favorite activities here. It shows the attitude that people enjoy every moment. When I see the pansy bloom, I feel that the summer has come.





Fig. 85 Kauppatori (2016) for Pikku Saari





Fig. 86 Pesaraita (2016) for Pikku Saari





Fig. 87 Parveke (2016) for Pikku Saari





Fig. 88



Fig. 89





Fig. 90



Fig. 91





Fig. 92



Fig. 93



Fig. 94

Fig. 88 - 94 Represent pictures for Pikku Saari, collection 2016



## Collection 2018

The newest collection which is about to release in June is about slowing down and capture the beauty of the surroundings. Spending time at the summer cottage by the lake is such a primitive way of life and at the same time the most refreshing experience. Modern life is apart from the nature and summer cottage will help people with bring your nature back. Collection consists of three new designs such as Käsityö (handcraft), Järviä (lakes) and Kukkia (flowers) and one from the previous collection Pisaraita (stripes of drops).

### **Järviä (Lakes)**

#### **Cotton-linen, cotton 85% & linen 15%**

When you see the map of Finland, you will notice that there are so many holes. They are all lakes and every lake has a name. Some of the lakes are inspired by the shape of the lake. Every summer we rental a cottage in the lake district area and enjoy life in front of the lake. The simple way of life is so relaxing that you remember what is important in life.

### **Kukinto (Bloom)**

#### **Cotton Double Gauze, Cotton 100%**

Flower starts to bloom in May in Finland. One of the first flower is *vuokko* and it blooms on the Mother's Day. New leaves and flower bloom at the same time as if they are competing who enjoys the summer first. I drew abstract flowers with water color to express the short but happy life of flower.

### **Käsityö (Handcraft)**

#### **Cotton-linen canvas, cotton 85% & linen 15%**

This is inspired by Finnish woven basket from birch. Basket is deeply in people's life here in Finland. People bring one to the forest to pick up berries and mushroom, to picnic and to shopping at the market. More and more people respect the tradition and handcraft.



Fig. 95 Color sample for Järviä (2018), Pikku Saari



Fig. 96 Color sample for Ruutu (2018), Pikku Saari





Fig. 97 Color sample for Kukinto (2018), Pikku Saari





Fig. 98 Color sample for Pisaraita (2018), Pikku Saari





## Eri Shimatsuka Exhibition 2015

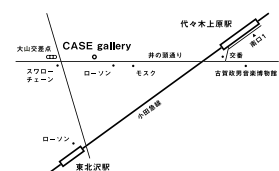
森のなか Metsän siimeksessä

10/02 fri. - 10/25 sun.  
Reception: 10/02 fri. 18:00 -

Welcome!

### CASE gallery

〒151-0065  
東京都渋谷区大山町18-23  
コートアネックス大山町1F  
TEL 03-5452-3171  
12:00-21:00 (会期中無休)  
[www.casedepon.com](http://www.casedepon.com)  
[mail@casedepon.com](mailto:mail@casedepon.com)



会場構成: 小林 恭+マナ (設計事務所 ima)  
後援: フィンランド大使館、協賛: 株式会社コッカ

Fig. 99 Print design for the Exhibition, *Metsän siimeksessä*, Tokyo 2015



# 6. Exhibition

## 6.1 Meaning of the exhibition

In this chapter, I went through the exhibitions that took place in 2015 and 2017 and also an upcoming one in 2018. The way of life and nature in Finland presented at the exhibitions are the source of inspiration for my works and the background of Pikku Saari. Often my message in the exhibitions is for people to slow down, relax, that there is no need to follow the crowd and to be oneself. These values are what Marimekko and Moomin contain in their philosophy as well. These are the values that I appreciate about the Finnish way of life and what Japanese people could apply more to their life. I hope the exhibitions give some hints for Japanese people to be who they are and relax. Through individual changes, also the society will eventually change. The exhibition does not deal only with Pikku Saari but it is also an important part of the exhibition's theme in a bigger picture. Having exhibition is a great way to introduce Pikku Saari as a part of my whole works in terms of marketing and PR of the brand.

I have organized a solo exhibition once a year in Japan since 2015. I am based in Helsinki, but I work intensively with Japanese companies. The first exhibition was very meaningful to me. Many people who have supported me and have influenced my life showed up and I could look back my life and see where I stand. The exhibition gave

me many hints to where I want to head to in the future.

There were many great reasons to organize an exhibition in Japan. First, I can show my various works in one place and create a unique atmosphere only for the exhibition. I do not have my own shop nor gallery, so usually my designs are displayed separately at department shops, fabric shops and so on. Therefore it may be difficult for people to know what I do as a whole. Secondly, it is a great opportunity to meet customers and communicate with them. Thirdly, besides showing my works, each time I have a certain theme for the exhibition. I deal with the concepts of things that are missing in Japan and what Finland can provide. Through the exhibition I hope people could feel familiar with Finland and find something that they can take into their life.

Along with the exhibition, there is usually an opening party, talk show and workshops. After I became a mother in 2016, I was interested in *värikylpy* which is a Finnish art activity for both mothers and babies originally started in Pori. In short, it is a baby painting workshop using edible colors. In 2017, I participated in the instructor course in Pori to get certified as a *värikylpy* instructor. I have organized several workshops for babies in Japan and it has proven to be very popular. This is not di-

rectly related to my own textile brand, but it is my role as a designer to introduce Finnish culture and this is a great way to open my eyes for Finnish way of growing children and education. Besides this workshop interests many people, especially parents with small children and brings more interests on my exhibition and activities in Finland. *Värikylpy* is a good spice for the exhibition.





## 6.2 Exhibition in 2015, *Metsän siimeksessä*

The exhibition was held at Case Gallery in Tokyo in 2015. The owner of the gallery used to be involved in importing interior fabrics of Marimekko and understands Finnish design. They have moved to a new place two years ago and I have my solo exhibition almost every year there.

I started to think what is missing in Tokyo and I thought right away about nature. Finnish forest is something sacred and through the sacredness it has something of the same feel that a Japanese shrine has. I wanted to make installation where people can experience something Finnish. For the exhibition, I made two spaces made of three pieces of fabric.

I spent two weeks at the summer cottage in Finnish country side. I was drawing lots of trees and developing the designs. I made three patterns of trees. In a fabric, a big tree was printed using the maximum width. The tree is in the repeat, so it could grow as much as possible. There are two colorways for the design. One is bright season and the other is dark season. Using these fabrics, I made two different spaces where a person can enter and be alone. Inside the space, there is Artek's stool on which is a hand-tufted moss and lichen cushion.

In the bright forest, you could hear the sounds of birds and enjoy the sunlight. In the dark forest,

the atmosphere is much calmer and you put ear plugs and hearing protection ear muffs in order to make as silence as it could be.

Silence is one of the important elements to life in Finland. I was surprised how silent Helsinki it is after having spent in Benin for 5 weeks. I was also impressed by the story from Maaria Wirkkala about the cottage in Lapland. Maria is Tapio Wirkkala's daughter and I interviewed her and wrote an article about Tapio Wirkkala and Rut Bryk for *Elle Décor Japan*. Their family spent the summers at the cottage in remote Lapland. After several days Maria started to hear her own heartbeat, but she was not scared. I did not know that you could hear your own heartbeat. Next summer we had a chance to stay at a cottage where there is no electricity. It was totally silent. There I heard my own heartbeat for the first time in my life. I wanted to create a similar situation in Tokyo so that people in Japan could also experience this.

Besides the installation, I exhibited my print designs for Marimekko, products for Kippis and fabrics for Kokka. The space design was done by IMA, a Japanese interior design office who has designed many shops for Marimekko both in Japan and Finland. I sent the concept of the designs to IMA and they created a forest of textile using cylinder shaped cardboard.

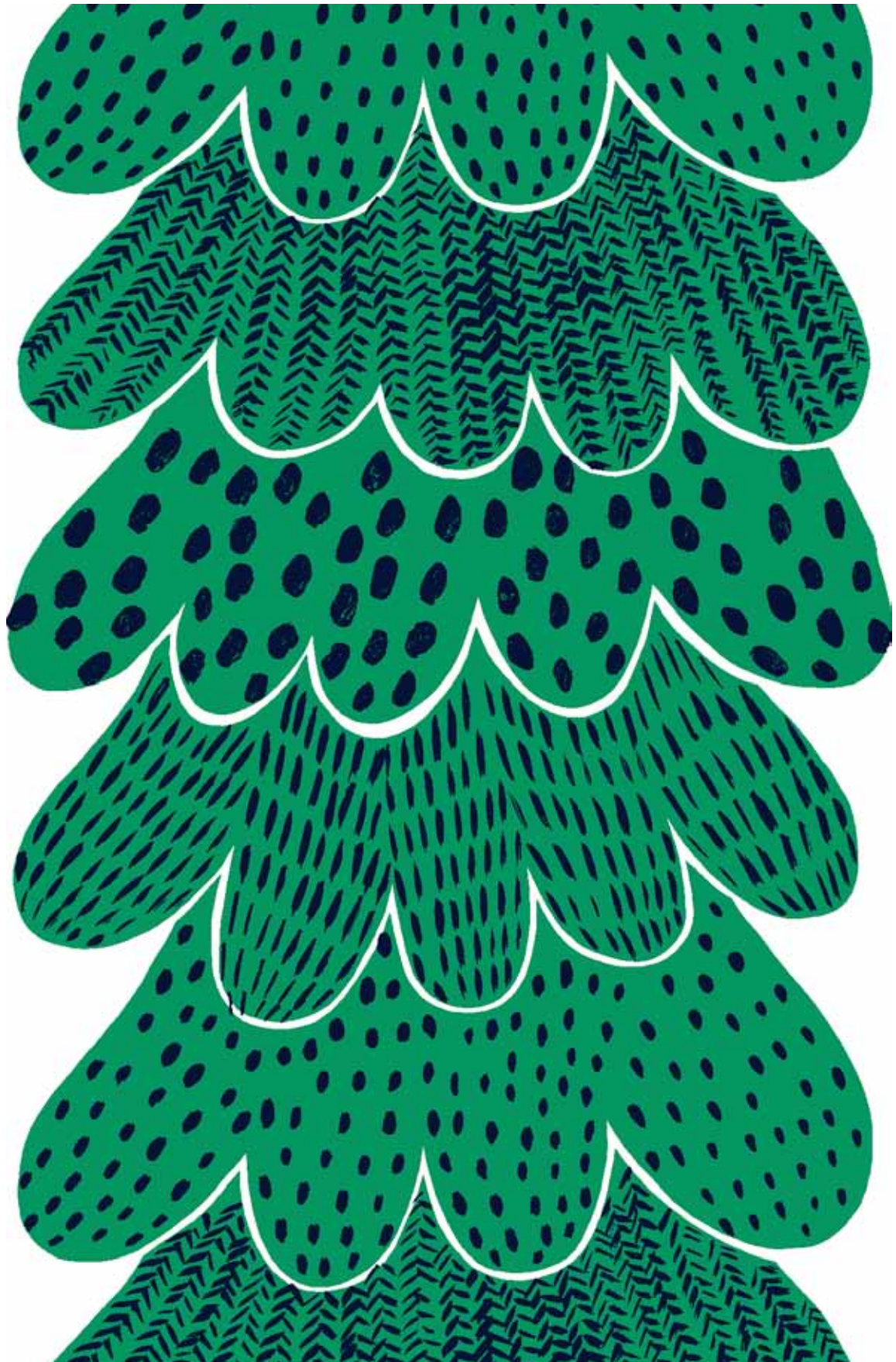


Fig. 100 Invitation for the Exhibition, *Metsän siimeksessä*, 2015



Fig. 101





Fig. 102



Fig. 103





Fig. 104



Fig. 105



### 6.3 Exhibition in 2017, *Mökki*

I have had an exhibition in Tokyo and Toyama in Japan. The theme of the exhibition was *Mökki*, a summer cottage in Finnish. The idea came when I saw the picture of the new building of Case Gallery: a triangular building with a big roof that was built on the small triangle-shaped lot. The building reminds me of a *mökki* and I thought it would be very interesting if *mökki* would show up in the middle of Tokyo.

It is in front of a wide street where many cars run all day long. I heard that it is quite a challenging space for an exhibition. The wall facing the street is made out of glass and pedestrians can see the gallery very well without stepping inside. I wanted to keep some secrets so that people would be more interested in seeing what is inside.

For the concept and interior design, I worked with Hamanishi Design and Yumiko Kosuge. Kunikazu Hamanishi is a product and interior designer. He has done several projects with Case Gallery. Yumiko Kosuge is an Art director for an advertisement company and helped in concept making.

The concept of the exhibition is that visitor can relax as if they were invited to a friend's

cottage. The visitors are offered berry tea and can sit outside on terrace when the weather is nice. We made small booklets where stories of *mökki* and print designs were introduced.

The façade was covered with a fabric panel and there were several windows so that people could peek inside. It was such a powerful image and many people watched from their cars and the image spread via Instagram which drew in more interest. The exhibition was a huge success. The owner told me that the *Mökki* exhibition had the most visitors of all the exhibitions that year.

The exhibition moved to Toyama. They did not use the same fabric panel wall. It took place at a *hokuo* and Japanese *zakka* shop called Chilling Style inside a town plaza building. The fabrics were hanged at the lobby which attracted the visitor of town plaza. The exhibition was at a corner of the shop, so it was a bit challenging to provide a strong visual image. The shop organized a talk show and baby painting workshop. It is such a great opportunity to get to know that people outside Tokyo. I would like to continue visiting different places in Japan to introduce my works and life in Finland.



Fig. 106 Booklet for the exhibition, *Mökki* 2017



Fig. 107 Invitation for the exhibition, *Mökki* 2017



Fig. 108



Fig. 109





Fig. 110





Fig. 111

(Fig. 108 - 112 Exhibition at Case Gallery, *Mökki* 2017)





Fig. 112





Fig. 113



Fig. 114

Fig. 113 - 116 Booklet for the exhibition, *Mökki* 2017



Fig. 115



Fig. 116

## 6.4 Exhibition in 2018, *Loma*

This year I will have three exhibitions in Toyama, Wakayama and Tokyo. The title of the theme is *loma*, which means vacation in Finnish and I believe it is key concept of the Finnish way of living. Most of the people have a one-month holiday in July. It is not the same Finland if there is no *loma*! People try hard, feel better and survive because everyone has *loma*. And that is something that we do not have in Japan. According to UN Happiness Report, Finland is ranked as the happiest country in the world this year. I think *loma* contributes a lot for this, too.

In addition to products of Kippis and Pikku Saari, the exhibitions will introduce my projects in Okinawa. In 2017, I got an offer to design four textile designs for a new hotel in Miyako Island. It is a resort hotel in front of the sea. I lived in Okinawa for three years before moving to Finland and have always wanted to do something related to Okinawa. The person who is leading the project found me through a web magazine and my dream came true.

*Loma* is the common concept for the work I have done nowadays. *Loma* is where you can be as you are, and I wanted to create a space where you can achieve that in the middle of Tokyo. I am planning to interview Finnish people about what *loma* means to them and make some booklet about it. I hope the notion of *Loma* will make Japanese people realize something new and bring many hints for a happier life.





Fig. 117 Textile designs for Hotel Locus, Okinawa 2018



Fig. 118 Artek chair with Pikku Saari textile

## 7. Conclusion

Firstly, I studied what have made Japanese people so interested in Finnish design in the recent years. There are several reasons for that. *Kamome shokudo* (2016) played a great role in causing *hokuo* boom in Japan. The message of the film is that live your life as you are and relax. This message encouraged many women. Life in Japan as a woman is not easy. There are clear gender roles and the situation is much harsher if you are also raising children. It is very difficult to get a place from a day care even if you are working. Some people have to give up their workplace if they cannot find a day care place. Most fathers come home very late and mothers have to take care of children alone during the week-days. Those are reasons why many women are so encouraged by the movie. Relaxing lifestyle of Scandinavia attracts many people in Japan and *hokuo zakka* plays a great role in bringing small happiness into daily life.

Secondly, I studied through several interviews what kind of values Japanese are expecting from a Finnish brand. As the interviews showed, timeless, long lasting, good quality and functionality are the key words that Japanese people seek for in Finnish design. The heritage of the golden age of Finnish design still plays an important role in the Japanese market. These values influence me as a designer and these I want to reflect in Pikku Saari brand as well. It draws inspiration from Finnish nature and lifestyle, which is timeless. Print design can also become timeless when it becomes part of someone's life. Many people recall what kind of print design was used for the interior in childhood. The textile itself does not exist anymore, but the memory stays for a long time. Concerning long lasting and good quality, good materials are chosen for Pikku Saari. Fabric by meters itself does not have a function but how people use the fabric is assumed beforehand and the size of the print design and the material of the fabric are adjusted. Functionality is considered when we make some products for collaboration.

Thirdly, I made a research on other textile brands in Japanese market to find out what makes a brand unique and what kind of tools they use for marketing. Through the brand studies of nani IRO and minä perhonen, I learnt that the brand image and its concept need to be clear, unique and distinctive. Secondly, products are proudly made in Japan. Kippis points out that a unique collaboration that nobody has done



before is a very effective way of marketing. Collaboration is a great tool to reach more users. Kippis is a Japanese brand but the designs are from Finland. The strength of the brand is that they know what Japanese people want.

After the brand studies, I tried to find out through several interviews what Japanese customers expect from Finnish textile designers. The interviews showed that the customers do not necessarily seek for minimalism in Finnish design, but as designer Teija Puranen noticed, cuteness and softness are highly valued in Japanese market. It is important to know what the Japanese customers expect from a Finnish designer. Those would be a good starting point for the designs, and it is designers' task and challenge to create designs which are unique with their own taste and also meet the expectation from the customer.

The interviews also revealed that Japanese clients expect certain Finnishness from the designer. The uniqueness of Pikku Saari is that the designs are inspired by the lifestyle and nature from Finland and expressed with my artist expression. That is my Finnish twist in my design and one of the elements which make my brand distinguish from others.

All the research in the thesis was examined in order to think how Pikku Saari could be further developed. I have made three collections for Pikku Saari so far. It seems like the sales of the first collection was slightly better than the second one. According to the staff of Kokka, buyers are usually interested in a new brand. The third collection will be released in June 2018. Pisaraita is one of the designs from the second collection and it has sold very well, so it was again in the third collection with different colorways. I would like to create more long-lasting designs.

Because of the *Hokuo* boom, there are many *Hokuo*-looking items in Japan. The same thing applies in the textile industry. Unfortunately, products and prints including Unikko, are often copied. It is very important to create unique designs which are not in the market or otherwise they would be easily categorized as *Hokuo*-like products. To avoid this, it is essential to emphasize where the inspiration comes from and the story of the designs and brand will also support the design. Kippis also points out the importance of emphasizing that the design is from Finland and the Finnish lifestyle is behind the story of print designs. Finnish lifestyle is one of the inspirations of Pikku Saari and it will be reflected more in marketing such as catalogues, website and exhibition as a communication tools.

It is necessary to strengthen the brand image as a whole. Pikku Saari does not have a shop nor place where people can experience the atmosphere of the brand. Exhibitions will be held about once a year, but it is only temporary exposure. Website and social media such as Instagram will be great tools for communicating with customers. I will put more effort into visualizing the brand online. I would also like to do the collaboration with Finnish fashion designer or product designer to make some

unique promotion samples in the near future.

Besides that, participating in events is significant. There is a popular textile fair called 'Nunohaku' (Textile expo) twice a year in Tokyo and once a year in Kyoto. (Fig. 119) It is open to the public with a small entrance fee. I participated once in 2017 and was impressed how, especially women are interested in textile in Japan. I had a solo exhibition one week after the Nunohaku and this fair was such a perfect place to inform people about the exhibition. Many of the people who came to my exhibition had visited the textile fair. Unfortunately, I could not join the fair this spring, but I will consider joining again next time. It is a great event to present new designs and inform about the exhibition. Nunohaku is also a wonderful event where you can meet customers and see their feedbacks directly.

I will have an exhibition in three places in Japan in May and June. This time I will present my works for Kippis, Locus Hotel in Okinawa and Pikku Saari. From Pikku Saari, I will introduce new collection and collaboration items. I hope many people will come to see the exhibitions and that will open up new opportunities for the brand.

It is rewarding to research the connection between Finland and Japan to seek what I could offer by means of the textile brand as a cross-cultural designer. Because of the unique condition that I am a Japanese designer living in Finland, one of my important roles as a designer is to connect between these two cultures as a messenger. Japanese and Finnish people are interested in each other's cultures and it is often said that there are similarities between these two such as modest and shyness. In spite of these minor similarities, Japan and Finland are very different in the social system such as hierarchy, welfare, gender equality, lifestyle and working environment, service, tradition and so on. More different we are, more interesting and stimulating and we can learn from each other since no nation is perfect. It is my lifework to work between these two cultures as a designer and give opportunities to people to get to know the different cultures and to look back where they are and how they can be to make something better.

This thesis gave me a much clearer vision of my work and showed the future direction of the brand. People who like Finnish designs and culture are usually women between the age of 20 and 60. The target group of Pikku Saari is about the same as *Hokuo* fans. The goal of Pikku Saari is to make people's life happier through the design. Finland was chosen as the happiest nation in the world in 2018 according to an annual publication from the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. All other Scandinavian countries are ranked in top 10. Happiness of daily life is something that I want to express in the brand. The strength of my design is playfulness, cheerfulness and some cuteness. I hope Pikku Saari will bring a small happiness in daily lives. Japan and Finland celebrate the 100th anniversary of friendship as na-

tions. I am looking forward to organizing more events to bring Finnish and Japanese people together through the brand. Pikku Saari is one of my significant activities as a textile designer and this brand plays an important role in communicating between these cultures.

at 京都市勧業館みやこめっせ

NUHO-HAKU

布博

in 京都 vol.5

2018.3.10.Sat-11.Sun

入場料  
500円

Sat 11:00-17:00 Sun 10:00-16:00

<Stage Information>

3.10.sat

12:30~13:15 tico moon

13:30~14:15 ビューティフルハミングバード

15:30~16:15 Chima

3.11.sun

11:30~12:15 Chima

13:30~14:15 ビューティフルハミングバード

14:30~15:15 tico moon



Fig. 119 Website of Nunohaku, 2018





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Fig. 106  
Photography by Miho Kakuta

Fig. 107  
Digital file

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Fig. 113 - 116  
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